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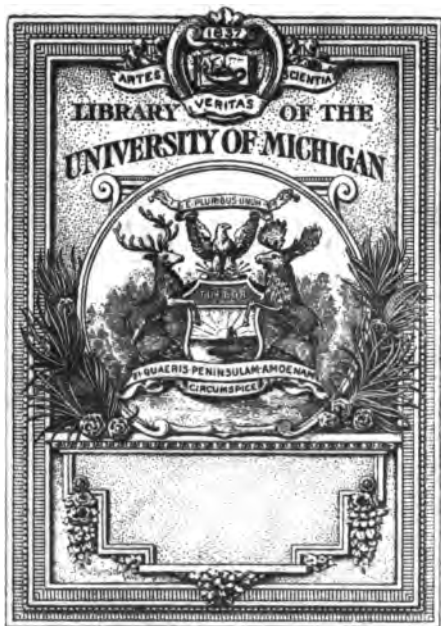
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IN TWO VOLUMES.

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IN

ENGLISH CHALK.

(Second Series.)

BY

E. C. GRENVILLE: MURRAY,

AUTHOR OF "THE MEMBER FOR PARIS," ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1878.

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OF THE AUTHOR'S SINCEREST REGARD.

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L'EMPIRE C'EST LA PAIX.

L'EMPIRE C'EST LA PAIX.

REMINISCENCES OF A ZOUAVE.

I.

I REMEMBER being particularly pleased at reading in a newspaper the fine speech of our Prince President, in which he said: "*L'Empire c'est la paix.*" He was only Prince President then, but it didn't matter. "If Empire means peace," said I, "I'm for an Empire."

"And why?" asked Blanchette.

"Because if it's peace, they won't be wanting any soldiers, and I shan't have to serve my seven years."

"That's true," murmured Blanchette, blushing a little. "Then I'm for an Empire, too."

Blanchette and I were betrothed to one another: at least it was almost a settled thing between

Blanchette's father, old Jean Poireau, and me, that if I wasn't taken by the conscription, he'd hear what I'd got to say about being married. I didn't much like him, old Jean Poireau. If I waited for Blanchette after vespers, or danced more than one quadrille with her at the village balls, he'd come up and say, "Look here, young Aristide, just you sheer off; when you've drawn your lot and I know what's to become of you, then we'll see; but, for the present, keep your distance." Blanchette and I were often reduced to nodding to each other and sighing. I believe she thought it hard; I know I did.

Well, the conscription week arrived at last, and the drawing of the lots was to come off on the Friday. On the Sunday, going in to Mass (church is always very full on the Sunday before the conscription), I met Blanchette and said, "Blanchette, Blanchette, I feel all the courage running out of me as the day approaches; if I draw a bad number, the best thing I can do is to go and throw myself into the pond."

"No, no," answered Blanchette, rather pale; "you mustn't do that. Promise me you won't do

it," she added, laying a hand on my sleeve. Her eyes were full of tears, and her little hand shook. I thought myself a brute for making her miserable. I pressed her hand somewhat tremulously and whispered—

"I'll tell you what, I'll go and call to-morrow on that Deputy of ours, M. de Champ-Guillaume, who makes us such fine promises at election time. I've never asked him for anything, and he can't refuse to drop a word to the Prefect about getting me exempted. He'll tell him I'm short-sighted, or that there's something the matter with my heart, which will be true enough, Blanchette."

Blanchette dried her eyes and tried to smile. When she smiled, it put hope in me for a whole day. We sat side by side at Mass that morning, and on the morrow early I started for the château of Champ-Guillaume, with two of mother's best capons in my basket, and a bunch of winter flowers in my hand. You see it's always as well not to go empty-handed, even when calling upon a millionaire.

M. le Comte de Champ-Guillaume was the great

man of our district. In 1851 we were living under a Republic, but we called him M. le Comte all the same; which used to annoy him at election time, when he would insist upon being addressed as "Citizen," saying that we were all brothers, and that he was not a jot more than we were. Very affable he was, to be sure, at election time, M. de Champ-Guillaume; and it was on the strength of this that I had determined to go and appeal to his kindness.

To tell the truth, however, what I purposed asking him was not exactly—well, no, not exactly fair, for the law said that those only should be exempted from service who could pay for a substitute, who were the only sons of widows, or who had bodily infirmities; and I stood in none of these categories. But then, it was well known that the Count never scrupled to use his influence for his own tenants, and so why should he not do as much for me? Besides, as Empire meant peace (and everybody was beginning to say we should soon have an Empire), what could the Government care about one soldier more or less?

I found M. de Champ-Guimaue reading the *Moniteur Universel* on his lawn, with a cup of coffee before him, and a cigar between his lips. There was no election near, so that he didn't offer any objection when I addressed him as Monsieur le Comte. I don't even think he would have been much offended had I called him Monseigneur, as I noticed his two footmen did. He was graciously pleased to accept my two fowls, and promised that the flowers should be remitted to Madame la Comtesse; then, he set his eyeglass in his left eye and asked me what I wanted.

Upon this, I confess I felt rather as if I should like to turn back and go home, for M. le Comte de Guimaue with the eyeglass, and the Citizen Guimaue who had shaken hands with us all in front of the ballot-box, were individuals so entirely unlike, that it was difficult to realise they formed but one and the same person. I began to mumble something about the conscription, but made such a mess of it that he soon pulled me up, by exclaiming—

“Ah! just so, I perfectly understand; you are

going to become one of our brave national defenders, and have come to say good-bye. Well, my lad, I wish you joy, and" (here an affable smile) "plenty of fighting."

This wasn't it at all. I stammered and looked foolish.

"No, M. le Comte, it's just the other way. I agree with your speech about universal brotherhood, and no more conscription. You remember what you said about the conscription being like a monster that devoured its own children? I'd rather not fight anybody; I want to become 'an honest tiller of the soil' and marry Blanchette."

I observed that the visage of our Deputy lengthened as I recapitulated the items from his last electoral address; the term "honest tiller of the soil" was also his. He coughed, drew up his shirt-collar, and answered somewhat confusedly—

"H'm, just so; I am, as you say, devoted to peace, and have always—yes, always—admired brotherhood. Nothing like brotherhood. But—ahem—if you had learned Latin, you would perceive the truth of the words *Si vis pacem, para bellum*—the

meaning of which is, that unless France has a large standing army, civilisation would be shaken in its basis, and there could be no security either for your father's field or for mine. It is from this motive, and this alone, that I voted the contingent of eighty thousand men this year. I beg your pardon; I didn't catch your remark."

"I was saying that it was very hard, M. le Comte, to be taken for seven years against one's will."

M. le Comte joined the fingers of both his hands by the tips, and answered with unction—

"It is one of the most glorious traditions of democracy that every citizen shall pay his debt to the State, and the obligation falls upon all alike. Whilst you, my lad, will give seven years of your life, I on my side shall not be exempt. This very year I shall have to pay no less than two thousand five hundred francs to exonerate my son Hector; another of my sons, the Vicomte de Champ-Guillaume, is actually serving his country at the present moment in a regiment of hussars."

"Yes, M. le Comte," I rejoined, with some bit-

teness; "but the Vicomte de Guimauve is an officer, and can marry if he likes."

"But so will you in due time acquire a grade in the service if you be diligent and valiant. Listen, my lad," added our Deputy with a sudden display of benevolence: "you may rely upon me; if you are taken by the conscription, I will exert my influence with the Ministry of War, and get you made—yes, get you made—a corporal."

"And Blanchette?" I muttered, not much seduced by this brilliant prospect.

"Who is Blanchette?" inquired our Deputy, who, I may here remark, put wax to his moustaches, wore dye on his hair, and passed for an admirer of the adverse sex.

I explained who Blanchette was, M. le Comte listening with more attention than he had bestowed upon several of my other observations; and when I had done, he gave an encouraging smile—

"Rest easy, my good boy; I have heard of this Mademoiselle Blanchette, though I have never seen her. I will speak to her father if you go away, and

we will take care that she is not married to any but a worthy man."

After this consolation, all that remained for me to do was to disappear, which I did with speed. Don't ask me if I sang and whistled on the road going home, nor if I looked exuberantly cheerful during the next three days. There were ten or a dozen of my fellow-villagers in the same predicament as myself, and it wouldn't have done to put on a wry face before them. After all, a man is a man, you know, and must hold his head high. If I suffered anything, I hope I kept it to myself. By Friday morning I had got my pulse into subjection, and was prepared to face the fire—I mean the conscription-box—in the same kind of spirit in which a man had better always face unpleasantnesses.

Just as I was walking up to the Mairie to draw my lot, Blanchette, who had been looking out for me, wondering why I had kept aloof from her during three days, ran across the road and slipped a small parcel into my hand. It contained a medal of the Virgin and a note. Here is the note; I have not altered the spelling:—

"Aristide, they say that To ware this next the hart and To repeatte three times an AVE MARIA, and to say just Before dipping one's hand Into the box, '*Sainte Vierge de Bon secours, ecoutez celle qui m'aime,*' will make one draw a Good number. Please do it, Aristide, and you mustn't laugh in Doing it. You knowe it can't ever Do any harm.

"BLANCHETTE."

No, Blanchette, it did no harm, I am certain; but probably Fortune was out of sorts with me that day, for when I dipped my hand into the box—and I did not laugh, I assure you—I drew out a number which I could not read at first from thinking of you. So I gave it to the Major, who read it for me.

"What number?" asked the Prefect; and there was a second's pause whilst the paper was being unfolded.

"*Number thirteen,*" cried the Mayor.

"Good for the service," pronounced the General.

And ten days after, my poor Blanchette, I was a Zouave.

II.

There was no positive reason why I should hurry off so soon, for at that time the Government used considerably to give us five months' law: we drew

in February and joined in July. But where would have been the use of waiting? No sooner was the drawing over than old Jean Poireau said to me, "Aristide, my lad, I'm sorry for you, but you see it's all up now, and I trust to your honour not to say anything more to Blanchette." The next day, seeing me come out of the Mayor's house, where I had been to get my passport, he looked at me as if he were relenting a little, and cried, "Listen, lad: I don't mind your seeing her just once more before you start—to say good-bye." But I answered, "No, Father Poireau, best not; you shall shake hands with her for me; I am going this evening." And, sure enough, I took the train the same night.

You understand why I selected the Zouaves in preference to any other regiment.* The Zouaves were always garrisoned in Algeria then; their mission was to make the Arabs pay taxes; and as the Arabs would neither pay nor submit to our military tribunals—which for reasons of their own they considered

* A soldier who joins immediately after conscription is at liberty to choose his own regiment. If he avails himself of the five months' law (as most do), he is drafted according to his height and his breadth of limb. The lithest only are put into the Zouaves.

detestable—there was usually some fighting every quarter-day. It wasn't the tax-paying I cared about; I confess it was all one to me whether the Arabs settled their dues or not. But the Arabs fought like men, and in my then frame of mind I shouldn't have been over sorry if one of them had singled me out and cut my military career short. You see, that's the kind of impression being taken away from one's village makes upon one at first. By and by, when we have carried the musket a little, we grow wiser, or more callous, I don't know which.

I had not been a fortnight on African soil, and had scarcely got used to having the front part of my head shaved, as the fashion is in the Zouaves, when I was ordered off with my battalion to chastise Sidi-Ben-Mahmoud, of the tribe of Dusti. It wasn't quite clear to me what Sidi-Ben had done to deserve our visit; but as far as I could gather, he and his fathers had lived contentedly in the same village for a couple of centuries, and he obstinately refused to decamp in order that we might build a fortress on his property. That year, as it so happened, there had been a debate in the Chambers about the con-

dition of Algeria. It was complained that we were doing nothing there, that we had been twenty years in possession without effecting the least good, that the English would have colonised the country in half the time. The members of the Opposition had insisted clamorously that we should civilise the Arabs, and the Prince President had sent pressing orders to the Governor-General to push on the work of civilisation without delay. Our Colonel, M. de Fracasse, reminded us of these facts as we set off, and remarked that it was absolutely binding upon us to civilise Sidi-Ben. So away we went to attack his village. Sidi-Ben and his people defended themselves like lions, and gave us as warm a piece of work as we could have wished for. The fighting lasted all day, from ten in the morning to six at night, and we lost two hundred men—eighty killed, a hundred and twenty wounded. But in the end we got the best of it, and we civilised Sidi-Ben; for, when the battle was over, there was not a single stone in the village left standing upon another: the camels, sheep, horses, men, women, and children were all hashed into mincemeat, and Sidi-Ben him-

self lay gloriously dead in the middle of the field with twenty wounds upon him.

I kept so resolutely to the front throughout this affair, that when we returned to barracks, Colonel de Fracasse called me up and said, "Aristide Brosse, you're the sort of soldier I like. You take as kindly to fighting as a babe to mother's milk. I make a corporal of you."

So there was I a corporal. Instead of five sous paid regularly every five days, I received ten sous; on my sleeve I wore a red worsted stripe; and I was exempt from mounting guard. So far so good. But there was another aspect of my corporal's grade which I found less diverting. I had twenty men under my supervision, and if they were not irreproachably furbished as to their rifles, shoes, bayonets, knapsack-buckles, and uniform buttons, it was I who bore the blame. This leads me to remark what an edifying lot we were in our Zouave regiments. The Government would accept nobody for a Zouave who was not tough, nimble, and firm on his legs. But morals being no great object, the hot-tempered, rowdy, black-eyed countrymen of Provence were the

most welcome; they fought like the Arch-fiend when they were campaigning, and behaved much like the same personage when they were in garrison. It was with great pleasure I heard it said one day by a patriotic Prefect, that the army was an invaluable school for acquiring habits of steadiness and order; for I acknowledge it would hardly have occurred to me to enunciate such an opinion myself. When my men were not on duty, they were drinking absinthe; if they were not drinking absinthe, they were sustaining the national reputation for gallantry by laying siege to the wives and daughters of Arabs, who (I am talking of the male Arabs) broke their heads in return, or got their own broken, for the greater glory of civilisation. The proportion of deaths among us from *delirium tremens* was seven per cent. per annum,—a piece of statistics you will find in the official reports of the War Office for the year 1851, if you will take the trouble to consult that record.

I remained in Algeria nine months, during which period I had the satisfaction of judging how unreservedly we were hated in that loyal colony, and how extremely probable it is that we shall continue

to be hated there a hundred years hence, if we are not driven out of the country before that time. At the end of the nine months M. de Fracasse was summoned to Paris with his regiment. This was the first experiment in the way of having Zouaves to occupy garrisons in France, and there was considerable curiosity both amongst the public and amongst us ourselves to see what would come of it.

It was towards the middle of November, and the first observation I heard upon setting foot anew on French soil was, that "Empire was peace." Paris was in a steadily progressive state of simmer; Monsieur le Prince Président was being depicted every day in the *Charivari* with a beaked nose, a circumstance which, I recollect, struck me as ominous; for experience has shown that whenever the French Press is suffered to reach the beaked-nose stage of liberty, something curious is preparing behind the curtain. We Zouaves had nothing to complain of as regards the way in which we were received. On the contrary, it was as if we had suddenly landed in the City of the Blessed. Rations of wine, packets of cigars, roast-meat to our ordinary, inspection and

compliments by M. le Prince Président in person, distribution of five-franc pieces, all came showering down upon us like refreshing manna. Our officers received presents of game and dozens of champagne from the Elysée Bonaparte; and I believe all the regiments in Paris were treated with the same disinterested liberality as we. Naturally, we liked it; and when told that it would continue so all the year round, if only there could be an Empire instead of a finikin, flint-skinning Chamber, that was for ever doing its best to prevent the President from being open-handed, we were all agreed that the best thing Monsieur le President could do would be to send the Chamber to the right-about. This was especially my view, for the Government organs never ceased repeating that Empire meant peace, diminution of armaments, and encouragement of agriculture: things for which I cared more than for the cigars and the roast-meat. I had not forgotten Blanchette.

One morning M. de Fracasse rode into the barrack-yard, looking flushed and elated; it escaped none of us that he was wearing the ribbon of Com-

mander of the Legion of Honour, instead of the rosette of officer which he had sported the day before. He was a handsome man, Colonel de Fracasse, and, when under the influence of a glass or two of Burgundy, had no lack of eloquence.

"Zouaves," cried he, "don't you think we have had enough of a Republic managed by an Assembly of canting 'citizens,' who humbug us with a lot of promises they never intend to keep?"

The image of the Citizen Champ-Guillaume started up before me, and I shouted energetically "Yes, yes!"

The Colonel eyed me with pleasure. "Corporal Brosse," said he, "you're a brave soldier." Upon which encouragement my brother-Zouaves lost no time in roaring "Yes, yes!" too.

"Bravo!" responded the Colonel, delighted. "That's it, my men; who is there among you that wouldn't like to have his pay doubled, or to be sent home to his village, at his option?"——

The cheers waxed deafening.

"Who is there that wouldn't like to have his glass

full of wine, his pouch full of tobacco, and to marry the girl of his thoughts?"——

We grew black in the face.

"Then *vive le Princ*"——

But no, I snatched off my turban, and at the top of my voice, with all my heart and soul, shouted "*Vive l'Empereur!*"

The self-same hour I was made a sergeant, and a couple of days afterwards I was lying in the military hospital of the Val de Grâce, having been knocked over in the memorable affray that followed the *Coup d'État*.

III.

"You've done a pretty piece of work, Sergeant," groaned a man who was lying next me amongst the wounded at the Hôtel de Ville, before we were transferred to the hospital.

He made an effort to raise himself on one elbow; but the blood that was flowing from a bullet-wound in his chest left him no strength, and he sank back on the flags.

"Feel in my coat," he muttered, "and you'll find a pocket-book with my name and address, some letters, and some money. You're my enemy, but I can trust you to carry them to my wife." A throb of pain interrupted him, and caused him to pant; but he resumed,—“Tell her she must forgive me—you see, I promised her this morning that I wouldn't join in the fighting—she cried, and that's why I promised her—but when I saw you soldiers killing the Republic, I didn't think I had any right to stand by—so I fought: tell her that, won't you? And—I've two little children at home; let her tell them from me that a man can die but once, and that so long as his life has been—has been”—— He made another painful effort to raise himself, but there was a new gush of blood, and his words froze on his lips. When I crawled to him to search for his pocket-book, he could only look at me as if in gratitude; but I believe he was already dead.

A few minutes afterwards a patrol came in, with some officers and police-detectives, to separate the wounded soldiers from the “rebels,” and to carry the former to the hospital, the latter to the prison

infirmaries. As I was being lifted on a stretcher (one of my legs was broken), a detective stooped to examine my neighbour. "Oh, we know this one fast enough," he cried, with a grin; "it's one of those cursed radical journalists: a good riddance of a bad rubbish." And he gave the body a kick.

I writhed on my stretcher and felt myself glowing, seeing which, an officer said,—“Do you feel pain, my good fellow? Cheer up; you’ve spilt your blood in a noble cause, and you won’t go unrewarded.”

Well, no, I didn’t go unrewarded: I must do them that justice. Whilst I was lying at the Val de Grâce, not much cast down by my wound, but gloomy from some other cause that I couldn’t quite explain, I had my promotion as colour-sergeant brought me, though you’ll remember I’d not been plain sergeant above a few days. “Sergeant Brosse, I congratulate you,” said Colonel de Fracasse, who had come to the hospital to visit those of his regiment who were wounded. “Your conduct was admirable, my man. When we gutted the house of that infernal Jacobin Deputy, it did one’s heart good to see you work your bayonet. Fifteen dead in that house alone,

and five women amongst them! I'm sorry for the women, but why the deuce didn't they keep out of the way? Tonnerre de Dieu! Brosse, but it was a fine day, and the Reds won't forget it in a hurry. *Vive l'Empereur!* and *vive l'Armée*, eh, my lad!"

Vive l'Armée! It seemed to me a little inappropriate that he should cry *Vive l'Armée* at a time when we had just established a new Government that was pledged to give us peace. *Vive la Paix!* according to my notions, would have been more the thing; and as soon as I was released from hospital I gave effect to these views by asking for a month's leave to go and visit my village. I have no need to tell you why I was so anxious about this month's leave; it wasn't the impatience to air my uniform with its two gold chevrons; but I own to having hoped more than once of late, that old Jean Poireau, who had declined to give his daughter to a conscript, with one sou a day, might allow her to wait a few months for a sergeant-major, whose pay was close upon two francs. The Adjutant-major, however, refused me leave pointblack. "Brosse, you're a valuable soldier," said he, "and we can't do with-

out you. It's not more than four months now since the *Coup d'État*; and these Parisians, you know, we daren't trust them further than we can see 'em. At any moment we may be called upon to do another stroke of work."

"What! wasn't there enough blood-letting last December?" I murmured; and the vision of the gutted house, with its slaughtered women, rose up before me like a distant nightmare.

"That was nothing," replied the Adjutant quietly. "Please Heaven, one of these days we'll have much better fun than that, Brosse." And he turned on his heel, giving me a Havannah cigar to console me for not going to see Blanchette.

There was nothing for it but to wait. It was more than a year since I had looked at Blanchette, but I had heard news of her once or twice in letters from our village; and soon after the Adjutant had refused me leave, I received a letter, in which, amongst other items, it was said: "You will be Glad to heer, Aristide, that your old sweethart Blanchette is in good helth, and prittier than evr. But she's no longr a poor villige gurl for Mossieu le Conte de

Cham-Guillaume, Who has bin very goode to the Poireau family evr since you went, has founde her a place as dresmaker up at the towne of Mauveville, where she's very hapy and erns 4 Francs a day. Last time she cayme to the villige she had on a silk gownd."

I thought well of M. de Guillaume for keeping his word to me, and was glad to learn that Blanchette had got a silk gown. The letter had not come by post; it was brought me by a fellow-villager of the name of Fourmiceau, who had just joined our regiment as a recruit, and who assured me that Blanchette had shed a great many tears after my departure—poor girl! He also confirmed the assertion as to M. de Champ-Guillaume's kindness. The Count had come more than once to see old Jean Poireau; he had improved his cottage for him, and had procured Blanchette a place, so that she might not spoil her pretty hands churning butter and kneading bread. I felt softened towards M. de Guillaume, and regretted I had ever wronged him in thought. Perhaps Fourmiceau caught a trace of my emotion, for he exclaimed with a great gulp that sounded like a

sob, "O Sergeant! there's nothing like our village. I, too, was to have been married, if it hadn't been for this conscription. You know Rose Mignon: she was the prettiest girl in the village."

"Patience, Fourmiceau, patience; you'll see her again."

"Yes, but we should have been so happy together." (Here the honest fellow rammed four thick knuckles into each of his eyes.) "We were betrothed ever since we were so high—not four feet from the ground—and she swore she would never forget me. But how can I hope that now?" (And at this Fourmiceau's tears, oozing out between his fingers, inundated his woeful countenance.) "Once our back's turned, Sergeant, what have we to hope? We can't ask them to wait seven years for us."

"But it won't be seven years," I answered, endeavouring to solace him; "the Empire's not proclaimed yet; but it seems that in a day or two the Senate are going to Saint Cloud to offer the crown to the Prince President."

"And what difference will that make?" he inquired with a sigh.

"Why, Empire is peace, and the Emperor, as soon as he is at the Tuileries, will send us all home; the Colonel said so."

"Oh, God bless the Emperor," cried Fourmiceau fervently; and I fancy he went off that very moment to write a letter to Rose Mignon, begging her to wait for him just a little while longer.

I was quite correct in what I said about the Senate, for I had seen it in the *Moniteur*. Some days later, at morning parade, we were ordered for duty at mid-day to form a guard of honour on the road of the deputation. There were not only us Zouavès, but all the infantry of the Paris garrison—thirty thousand men—and we formed a complete double line the entire way from Paris to Saint Cloud. It was a fine sight: the whole population of the city was afoot, as it always is, to see anything that may happen to be going on, from a church ceremonial to a revolution, and the windows were gaudy with bunting, scarlet draperies, and long waving streamers lettered N. III. All the traces of the December

affair had disappeared. At most, had you searched the crowd, you might have found some child or woman in mourning, hurrying along to get out of sound of the festivity, and refusing to stop and look on, and cheer with the rest. But I do not fancy there were many of these; the people in mourning stayed at home; and the carriages of the Senators could roll unimpeded between two close-packed lines of curious Parisians, who, it seems, were almost as excited and enthusiastic as they had been four years before, when the Republic was proclaimed. I must say, however, if enthusiastic as a body, they were not sparing of criticisms individually, and, as carriage after carriage swept by, bearing Senators or Deputies (for there was also a deputation of representatives going to see the sight), I heard some rather astonishing comments from the spectators behind me:—"Hi, Jules, do you see old De Tourne-casque? he's wearing just the same face as he did when he went to swear allegiance to Charles X. and Louis Philippe—the old hunks." "Here's another again, look at him; it's De la Broche-Craquelin, who betrayed Henri V.; and beside him, Floupin, the

late solicitor to the Orleans family. Ugh! go and wash, both of you!" "Here's another pretty pair, Turpigny and De Borné, a couple of badgers to match; they'd both have been in Clichy by this time, if it hadn't been for the *Coup d'État*"—and so on flowed the compliments without a moment's cease. I listened, rather amused at first, for, after all, it was no concern of mine what they said; but, at last, amongst the carriages of the Deputies came that of M. de Champ-Guillaume, who had recently been re-elected in our Department as an official candidate, and his arrival was saluted by this broadside:—"Oh, here's De Champ-Guillaume, the old sinner; when he's not dangling after some ballet-girl, he's sure to be dancing a jig before the reigning Government. I saw him with a red bonnet on in '48, crying *Vive la République!* kick him from ever so high, he's sure to fall on his legs." At these words my patience abandoned me. It was Blanchette's benefactor they were insulting in this way; so I turned round in wrath and shouted—"What do you mean by speaking like this of your betters?" I suppose I looked rather ferocious with my half-

shaved head and my new moustache, for they suddenly held their peace, and the rest of the procession passed by uncriticised. I have remarked, by the by, that it is not very difficult to make Parisians hold their tongues, if you speak loud with a rifle in your hand.

Well, the deputation went and came, and there were mighty rejoicings and illuminations that night to celebrate the auspicious change from Republicanism to Empire. The soldiers had wine given them in the barracks, and we non-commissioned officers were regaled with Bordeaux and a glass of Cognac apiece. However, the Empire was not yet proclaimed officially; that was only to happen in December, eight months afterwards, and so I still had to take patience before I could hope for long leave, to expect to be disbanded. After all, I reflected, we must be reasonable; the Emperor has only just reached the throne; he can't reduce his army before making certain that he is safe. Let us wait our eight months.

And I did, and I was recompensed for my steadfastness: for at length the day of glory arrived, the

Empire was solemnly proclaimed at the Hôtel de Ville; there was a *Te Deum* at Notre Dame, and the whole army blossomed out into the new buttons, with the Imperial eagle and crown upon them. I am not a drunkard, but I drained three bottles that day and toasted the Emperor until the tables seemed to be dancing an infernal waltz around me. As a result, I was not particularly steady when I tottered to bed, but I had presence of mind enough to ejaculate as I turned in between sheets—

“At last! Providence be extolled! We shall have peace now.”

IV.

Would you believe that when, some six weeks after this, I applied again for leave, the Adjutant took me kindly by the arm and drew me into a corner, where, in a mysterious voice, and without further preparation, he said: “Look here, Sergeant Brosse: I don’t mind telling you—for you’re made of good stuff and won’t blab—we’re soon going to have a war.”

Had the Adjutant suddenly fired a pistol at my turban without cause or warning, I could not have looked more disgusted.

"War!" I echoed.

"Yes, war," he rejoined. "I knew you would be pleased; but, hush! not a word to anybody: the thing's a secret, and none of us are supposed to know it."

"And who are we going to fight?"

"Hush! I needn't tell you that. You're a Frenchman, Brosse, and in your patriotic heart must feel the wound of Waterloo rankle at every hour of the day. Stuff, man, it's no use denying; I've seen you at work and know you're one of the right sort. Well, you'll soon have a war to your heart's content: none of your trashy battles against Arabs or Reds, but a good slap-up tussle, with plenty of cracks on the head and promotion to follow."

"Then we are going to fight the English," I observed, with calm desperation.

"That's it, to fight the English. You understand, —the Emperor must show these caper-cutting Parisians that there's some of the old blood in him.

If he doesn't fall foul of somebody, they'll think he's cast in the same mould as that poor old Louis Philippe, who gave us almost eighteen years of peace; and that would never do; the people would soon be snapping their fingers in his face. No, Brosse, he must wipe off the old score of Waterloo, and you and I'll help him to do it. You can have three days' leave if you like; but we can't give you more; for the recruits 'll be coming up soon, and you'll have to drill 'em with all your might and main."

"And this is the Empire of peace," I remarked, with a ghastly grin.

"Yes," replied the Adjutant, grinning too; "we shall have peace—after the war."

What should you have done under such circumstances; sat down and howled? This would not have been a great assistance to me. I went straight off to a circulating library, asked for an annual register, drew out a pencil and paper, and set to work computing, by the aid of figures and probabilities, how long this heaven-forsaken campaign was likely to last. England, I was delighted to ob-

serve, was as ill-prepared for a war as possible. Nominal strength of army, 85,000; probable effective strength, 40,000. The navy, to be sure, looked biggish; but that branch didn't concern me. Against the 40,000 men we could launch 400,000 without trouble—i.e., ten men to one. Presumable result; have the English out in Flanders and eat up the last man in three weeks. Total duration of campaign, including preparations, about two months.

"Well, it's not so bad as I thought," I murmured, a little relieved. "If operations commence shortly, it will only put off my seeing Blanchette for three or four months. Meantime, it's no use going to the village for a couple of days only; I'll wait." Accordingly, I applied myself with zeal to the drilling of recruits.

Had I been less absorbed than I was with ideas of universal harmony, I might have noticed long before, that ever since H.I.M. the Friend of Peace had held the reins of power, the offensive forces of the country had been slowly increasing. As President he had added to the war contingent every year; as Emperor, he had inaugurated his reign by bravely

calling for twenty thousand more men than usual. There were signs, too, not discernible to the civilian eye, but which, as a soldier, ought to have struck me. All the magazines and store-houses were being replenished; our rifles were being examined, tested, and often exchanged for better ones; new accoutrements were not stinted; the cavalry were being remounted and reorganised; leave was difficult to obtain. These tokens are so many hieroglyphics which signify hostilities. However, the war did not come so quickly as the Adjutant had seemed to think. One month passed, then a second, then two or three more, and yet there appeared no symptoms of a quarrel with Great Britain. On the contrary, the talk was only about our brave allies, and the sympathique M. de Palmerston and M. le Comte d'Aberdeen, who loved us well, and about the new journey from Paris to London in twelve hours, price 110 francs first class.

When I called the Adjutant's attention to these unpromising symptoms, he replied that it was all "blague." "We're doing it to throw dust into their eyes," said he. "Perfidious Albion will guess no-

thing until we are down upon her." But even the Adjutant was soon bound to own that his perspicacity had been at fault. France and England, for a while hand in hand, were soon locked arm in arm. The time-honoured pictures of ridiculous Highlanders vanished from the print-shop windows; the comic actors, who were great at playing Englishmen, were significantly recommended to throw less local colour than usual into their exercises; journalism received a hint not to poke fun at the British. A new foe was looming on the horizon in the shape of the Czar of all the Muscovies, whom Gaul would not have cared to tackle without Albion.

Shall we fight or shall we not? The question oscillated on the trays of the balance for a doubtful time, until at last the ayes had it—war was declared.

Then it was as though France had been abruptly roused from a forty years' lethargy. A ferocious thrill shot throughout the land. In every village where there lingered a living wreck of that mighty army that marched to defeat and death in the Russian snows in 1812; in every hamlet where the

middle-aged men remembered the Cossack invasion of 1814, there was a crusade preached by old soldiers, Imperial officials, and priests. Young men sang the *Marseillaise*, and flew to be enrolled; old men looked up and talked of being revenged; young girls would smile upon none but soldiers, and accounted them poltroons who stayed behind; mothers sat down, and, with a sigh of patience, made lint—for mothers will never have a heart for war, say Ambition and Glory what they will. And there was all this excitement, all this fury, all this indescribable delirium, all these defiant shouts of men in public, all these tears of women in secret, for the sake of killing a few Russians. It is curious that men should hate each other so cordially from living on opposite sides of a boundary line.

In Paris everything was topsy-turvy. It does honour to humanity that an individual who had been harmlessly founding a journal for the propagation of peace doctrines, became of a sudden an object of contumely, and had to run one afternoon on the Boulevard des Capucines for his life; whilst, on the other hand, subscriptions for the war poured in

at such a ceaseless rate that ten million francs were reached in no time. Nobody remembered the *Coup d'État* or bore rancour from it; that was a thing of the past, now; ought we not all to remain united in face of the enemy? Calling to remembrance the condoning stuff of which we Frenchmen are moulded, I am often tempted to wonder that our rulers do not treat us to a *Coup d'État* more frequently, since they can obtain indemnity so easily by leading us off to a war. It was just exactly as if the people of France had made this bargain with our Emperor: "You killed five thousand of us to seat yourself on the throne; try and get a hundred thousand more of us put to death in the Crimea, and we give you a receipt in full."

As for myself, I was of course seized by the war contagion like the others. You don't remain long in a lazaret without catching some of the fever from the rest. Was it that I had ceased to sigh for peace and to think of Blanchette? Oh no, but I was beginning to perceive the truth of what our Adjutant had said. "We can't expect the Emperor to let himself pass for a craven soul," I reasoned: "first

let him prove that he is not afraid of war, and then we shall have peace ever after; for the other nations will be wary of molesting him." It was a variation on M. de Guimauve's text, *Si vis pacem, para bellum*. It is true I was a little out at sea as to our reasons for assailing the Russians; but this was a point of no importance. It's a soldier's duty to obey orders, not to ask questions.

I am sorry to say, though, that I failed in the endeavour to instil these views into Fourmiceau, who revealed a soul altogether unpatriotic at the news that he was about to start for the Euxine. In vain did I point out to him that we were going to avenge the treatment that his grandfather had suffered, and consolidate the throne of the Sultan of Turkey. He made use of disrespectful expressions towards his grandfather, and wished the Sultan of Turkey in a city some latitudes south of Constantinople. There was no bringing him to his senses. He snivelled and whimpered in the most dismal way. "You promised me peace, Sergeant, and I wrote to Rose to wait for me. I shall never be able to do that again."

"Courage, Fourmiceau," I exclaimed; "think of the promotion and the Crosses of Honour, man."

"Yes, there are plenty of Crosses of Honour," groaned Fourmiceau; "but there's only one Rose Mignon. Rose is more to me than a million crosses."

What was I to say? My own heart was not of the lightest. I had thought of running down just for a day and taking a parting look of Blanchette, but on second consideration I deemed it was better to keep away. Would it have been kind to renew our friendship, when the first news she might hear of me after our parting was that some Russian had sent me to sleep for good and all in the Crimean snow? And yet it seemed to me that I should at least like to thank M. de Guimauve for what he had done for Blanchette; I might not have another occasion; and you know, one goes less cheerfully to face death when there are debts of gratitude unpaid. However, an opportunity was given me.

I have said there were vast subscriptions organised for the war. They were of all sorts: some for the expenses of the war itself, some for the relief of

the wounded, others for the distribution of creature-comforts to the troops. It so happened that on one of the committees of this last form of subscription our Deputy officiated: and on the morning of our departure from Paris he came with a bevy of gentlemen in kid gloves and ladies with tricolour rosettes to hand glasses of cognac (in France nothing is done without cognac: no cognac, no enthusiasm), Bologna sausages, packets of cigars, and mugs of Burgundy out of a fine spring-cart covered with flags. In the midst of the excitement occasioned by his appearance, I pushed my way up to him, and with emotion said, "Monsieur le Comte, I wish to thank you for your generous protection of a girl whose name I had mentioned to you; it is noble of you to befriend the child of a poor man as you have done."

He did not recognise me at first, for my Zouave dress altered me; but when he had scanned my features, and heard me pronounce the name of Blanchette, it struck me that he turned red.

"Monsieur le Comte, I, too, am but a poor man," I added; "but in some days I may be a dead man, and a dying man's blessing never did any harm."

I hope you will allow me to shake hands with you."

At this I observed his redness change abruptly, and he became pale. I set it down to natural result of feeling. He gave me his hand, which was cold and shook somewhat, but his eyes did not face mine.

"You're a brave fellow," he stammered. "I—I—hope nothing will happen to you out there." He was evidently in a hurry to change the subject, for he turned round towards an officer in hussar uniform, who had come with him, and said: "This is my son—ahem—who is going out there, too. Raoul, here is one of our fellow-villagers. I trust if you have an opportunity of doing him a good turn you will not fail."

M. le Vicomte returned my salute, and cordially shook hands with me, when I ejaculated: "I pray, mon Lieutenant, I may have an opportunity of proving that gratitude is not a vain word. If you are ever in danger, may I be next you to ward it off."

Not knowing what had passed between his father and me, I fancy he imagined the Count had been

giving me a hundred-franc note; but as we Frenchmen are in the habit of offering to die for one another on slight incitation, my mode of tendering thanks would not appear to him particularly exaggerated.

To close the interview, the Count handed me a brimming glass of wine, and I drained it to the health of Blanchette.

I make no doubt you will dispense me from giving you an account of the Crimean campaign. It has been described often enough already, and I question if my additional experiences would be likely to interest you. Let me only remark that all the glories of war, such as I had beheld them on a small scale at the sacking of Sidi-Ben's village, and again in the gutting of houses and sweeping of streets in Paris, in December '51, I had full opportunities of admiring again at Alma, Inkermann, and the siege of Sebastopol. A battle is a fine thing. It is nothing more nor less than standing in close rows with not elbow-room enough, and firing at targets you are unable to see, whilst you are being mowed down in your turn by balls and bullets

you are unable to avoid. But there are degrees in battles. A small battle is one where the fun lasts but half a day, and you lose only ten or fifteen thousand men—the population of a flourishing borough town; a good battle worth speaking about is one that keeps you on your legs (or off them) for twelve or sixteen hours, and in which the two sides between them part with some fifty thousand men—the population of a thriving manufacturing city. I say nothing of those petty skirmishes which take place at the outposts, and in which you lose no more than a couple of hundred men—just enough to found an Australian colony with. A true soldier learns to disregard these; he is even a little ashamed of himself when he gets knocked down in engagements so insignificant.

One of the beauties of war is that it prepares men for a good many of the civic virtues, by making them splendidly indifferent to the sight of slaughter. I suspect this has not a little to do with the little account we Frenchmen take of such episodes as those which inaugurated his Majesty's most happy reign. How, indeed, get up much sympathy for a

few radicals swept into the gutter, when you have strode with unblenching eye, and your meerschaum pipe between your lips, over a field strewn as thickly with dead as a wood with fallen twigs after a hurricane? Thus public order is the gainer, and rulers who, in other countries less fortunate than ours, might hesitate to employ ball-cartridge to keep themselves in office, need never have such pusillanimous fears in France. If dead fall in our streets, we have a Morgue to receive them.

I missed none of the Crimean campaign, reaching the seat of war amongst the first, and leaving it amongst the last. I thought, at starting, the whole affair would take six months; and during the long siege of Sebastopol, being confident every day that we should take the town on the morrow, I wrote home but seldom, preferring, when the time came, to carry all my news in person. So I did not hear much of Blanchette; in fact, I did not hear about her at all; for the letters that came to me from the old people at home, were all about me, as mothers' and fathers' letters are, and there was nothing said of Blanchette. Perhaps you will wonder why I did

not ask them to break this silence, but we soldiers are superstitious, and like better to trust to the saw that no news is good news. On bivouac-nights, though, when those perishing Russian winds whistled keen and drove sleep away, more than once did I think of the patient little hands that were stitching in France, perhaps at the very moment I was musing on them. Blanchette, Blanchette! you lit up many a dark sky for me on bitter winter nights; and on that day when we lit the bonfires in the camp at the news that peace was declared, why did I colour like a schoolboy at the thought that there was nothing more now could stand between us two, since I was no longer a poor peasant, but a Captain, and a Knight of the Legion of Honour?

For I must tell you I rose to a captaincy over the bodies of my fallen comrades. Promotion marches quickly in war time, especially in the Zouaves. We were generally in the thick of the fighting, whatever it was, and our officers fell by the half-dozen. The epaulet of sub-lieutenant came at Alma; that of lieutenant at Inkermann; the captaincy arrived, by and by, in a kind of forlorn-hope affair,

in which I ought to have been blown into bits; but somehow escaped. As for the cross, it was pinned to my coat after a small skirmish, one of twenty others in which men by the score, who did more than I, were passed unnoticed. This is the fate of war. I had the luck to see lying on the ground an officer of hussars, who had just been dismounted, and, as the Vicomte de Champ-Guillaume was pretty often in my thoughts, I rushed forward to pick this officer up. Sure enough, it proved to be the Viscount. I hoisted him on my shoulders, and returned with him to our lines, walking backwards, so as to protect him, to the best of my ability, from our friends the Russians in front. When, at last, I deposited him safely on the ground, I found five hundred of our men had stopped firing to clap their hands, and half-a-dozen hussar officers carried me off to the General of the Division (M. de Fracasse, our old Colonel), who threw his arms round my neck and gave me his own cross. It seemed to me that this was a great deal of fuss for nothing, for I was not aware at the time that I had received a wound, and I felt more than recompensed

already, from having saved M. de Champ-Guillaume's life.

One evening, in May '56, I was rolling along a very dusty road in a very shaky fly, on the box of which Fourmiceau, who had left an arm in the Crimea, and who had become my servant, was gesticulating with the one hand that remained to him. Never very expert at controlling his sentiments, Fourmiceau was on this occasion giving full career to his sensibility, and bedewing his honest cheeks with an emotion rather contagious. For the fact is, we were on our way to our village, which I had not seen since five years, and Fourmiceau since four; and Fourmiceau began to gesticulate at the precise moment when we came in sight of the first well-remembered cottage, around and opposite which the whole village were gathered to receive us. It seems we were heroes, for my old father and mother sobbed as if their hearts would break when I got out of the fly, and neither of them found strength to do anything but cling to me. Poor father! His two brave old hands shook like in ague when they felt my cross and epaulets; they had never so played with baubles for sixty years. But mother was not

looking at the epaulets: "Why are you carrying a crutch, my boy; you never wrote to us that you were wounded?"—"Bah, mother, it's nothing, it doesn't prevent me from walking."—"But—but, child, you can scarcely stand—you're crippled—they've been maiming you, those Russians have."—You see, I'm selfish—I'm speaking only about myself: but there was just the same scene with Fourmiceau.

Great glories of war, you leave fine hand-marks upon our villages! After father and mother our old fellow-villagers came clustering up around us,—that is, such of them as were living; for where was sturdy Jacques, who guided his plough so straight, and Antoine, who sang so roundly at the village wakes, and Louis, who was our village champion at bowls? There is the mother of Jacques, with her face pinched awry from weeping; there the father of Antoine, pressing up to ask us whether his boy has a grave to himself in the cemetery at Balaclava; and in yonder cottage lately lived the parents of Louis, but the cottage is empty now. When the old people received the black-bordered envelope it broke their hearts, and they're both dead!

But why linger on such episodes? a day of return

should be a day of joy. Some must die that others may conquer; and if Jacques, Antoine, and Louis have lost their lives, surely it is for their country's—at least, for the Emperor's—sake, and no patriotic parent could wish them a better fate. I turn from the faces nearest me, most of which I own are careworn, for it appears the taxes have been heavy this year; and as there were not hands enough to plough the fields, there is likely to be no harvest next August,—I turn from these faces and look around me for old Jean Poireau; then, in a low voice, I ask for Blanchette. A feeling creeps over me that she must be somewhere in the crowd—hiding to see whether I would inquire for her, and prepared to come forward with her sweet eyes smiling, tearful, yet ready to gaze into mine with the same candid look of bygone days. I look around, and there is no Blanchette. But, perhaps, she is still away at Mauveville, in the place M. le Comte procured her, and her old father has gone to live with her?

“Isn't that it, mother; Blanchette is still at Mauveville?”

“Oh, my boy!” answers mother. “Is it of Blan-

chette you're speaking? Why, Blanchette has become a great lady."

"A great lady, mother?"

"Yes; M. le Comte found her a place at Mauveville, but she's been gone from there these two years. Somebody else got her a place in Paris, and now she's very rich, and has her carriage, and wears golden bracelets."

"Then she's married?"

"I don't know, child; perhaps she may be. But I hear she's a great actress at one of the Paris theatres, and earns showers of money."

Just then Fourmiceau pulls my sleeve, looking very woe-begone and pale. "I knew it would be so, Captain. Rose Mignon's gone. She's left the village for Paris, and nobody has any news of her."

"And these are not the only two," remarks our poor old Curé, with a sigh; "for the Conscription takes the village girls as well as the village lads."

V.

Blanchette an actress—Blanchette ride in her carriage! And yet why not? We soldiers are no Puritans that we should think a woman lost because she performs on the boards of a theatre. We respect Art, and is not the stage one of the highest branches of art? Is it not a noble profession, and one which many of the purest and best of women have exercised? Why shouldn't my Blanchette be an actress?

I thought for a while I was going to be a cripple for life—my wound being a shell one, tiresome and long to heal. But I ended by pulling through, and when, after six months' nursing, I was strong enough to resume service, I set off for Paris with the intention of going to all the theatres one after another, and looking for Blanchette. I ought to mention, by the by, that I had ceased to be particularly enthusiastic in the cause of disarmament. At the end of the Russian campaign I had been drafted into the Zouaves of the Guard with a pay of 6000 francs, and some of my views on military matters were

much modified. I was beginning to understand that a great nation should not be niggardly with regard to its troops; and though far from decrying the advantages of peace, yet I deemed it incumbent upon every one to admit that war had its compensations. This is one of the most satisfactory results of having an immense standing army raised by forced conscription. The opinions of one half the men are at total variance with those of the other half, which prevents monotony. Those who have been dragged away from their fields, and remain privates on two sous a day, detest the service, groan for reductions, and are in favour of constant peace. On the contrary, those who in war have won epaulets—which they would never have acquired by planting turnips and ploughing corn-land—have the strongest objection to any change.

So I came to Paris. I had ascertained from our Mayor that Blanchette was not married. It is impossible to get married in France without the fact being known in one's village by the publication of banns, and there had been no banns published for Blanchette. I concluded she had been befriended

by some great artist who had seen signs of talent in her; perhaps by some manager, who, in passing through Mauveville, had been struck by her beauty. I had read of such things in books. It is true that, at the time I knew her, Blanchette could do little more than just read and write, but there was nothing to prevent her having perfected her education after my departure. She might have had opportunities of study at Mauveville. Anyhow she had succeeded in obtaining an engagement, and I was persuaded that all actresses were required to be well educated.

I had looked in vain for the name of Blanchette Poireau in all the newspapers and playbills, but that did not alarm me. Without quite understanding the practice, I was aware that French actresses seldom played under their real names, and there was nobody in our village who could enlighten me as to Blanchette's pseudonym. I began my tour of inspection by the Théâtre Français, where I went five nights running to see different pieces; after that I tried the Odéon, then the Gymnase, then the Vaudeville—resort of high-class comedy. After that I ex-

explored the Gaieté, Ambigu-Comique, and Porte Saint Martin—homes of melodrama and tragedy; and one night I went to the Palais Royal, feeling very nervous the whole evening, for I should not have liked to find Blanchette there. It occurred to me that perhaps the villagers had made a mistake, and that Blanchette was a singer, not an actress. Her voice had always seemed sweet enough to me for any opera-house in the world. I put on a dress-coat and white gloves, and went night after night to the Grand Opera, the Opera Comique, and the Lyrique. My brother officers at mess said, "Brosse has gone music mad," and our Colonel, hearing that I spent my evenings at the play, remarked that the whole of my pay would soon be swallowed up. He wrote to a brother of his who was connected with the Ministry of Fine Arts, and I received a packet of play-orders enough to carry me over a twelve-month. The Government is extremely civil towards us officers of the Guard.

We were in March '57, and the Paris winter season was almost over. I had seen all the "successes" of the year until I was sick of them. The

Fiammina of M. Mario Uchard, at the Français, haunted me like a nightmare. *Mathias l'Invalide*, of the Variétés, stalked after me like a ghost. *Les Marrons Glacés*, of the Palais Royal, had given me an indigestion; and the tunes of the *Reine Topaze*, at the Lyrique, buzzed in my head and made solitude hideous. A good many of the principal actresses were leaving Paris to go starring in the provinces. All inquiries on my part had failed to elicit any information as to Blanchette's whereabouts, and I felt almost disposed to give up my chase until the next year, when, one day, our Colonel gave out that an Exalted Personage was going to the Théâtre des Fantaisies Gauloises that evening, and that I was to be on duty.

When certain Exalted Personages in our country go to the play, it is usual, in view of possible eventualities, to accommodate a score or so of soldiers with places in the gallery, a dozen detectives with seats in the pit, and five or six military officers with stalls. The officers are in plain clothes, but no objection is made if they have a fancy to take a revolver in their pockets. Accordingly, towards seven

I made my appearance at the theatre, with an offensive weapon in the tails of my coat, but a demeanour and costume otherwise peaceable. With me went Fourmiceau. He was still my servant, and had a few days before expressed a desire to go to the theatre. I thought this a good opportunity of gratifying him, so he went into the pit.

The Théâtre des Fantaisies Gauloises is one of those devoted to a style of piece that came into fashion at about the same time as the establishment of the Second Empire. The burlesques and extravaganzas performed there would, in nine cases out of ten, provoke adverse manifestations on the part of the audience in countries entitled respectable. But we Frenchmen are exempt from prejudice; we don't go in for respectability—which, of late years, we have held to be an insufferably slow virtue, unworthy of an intelligent people.

On the evening of my visit the playbill announced *La Femme de mon Voisin*—a choice *lever de rideau*, in one act; and *Le Roi Candaule*, a musical burlesque in three acts.

This last was the *pièce de résistance*. It was a

delightful composition, much in favour at that time with the golden youth of our capital, and the manager was making roaring receipts with it; thanks, no doubt, to two or three ladies who, attired in no more raiment than was necessary, played with abundant spirit in the principal parts. For myself, having no great taste for pieces of the *Roi Candaule* type, I had never been to the *Fantaisies Gauloises* before; and finding that the Exalted Personage was not likely to arrive in his stage-box till eight, I sat down in the crush-room with a brother-officer to take coffee and chat.

A general election was soon about to take place, and the papers contained hardly any but electoral news. We discussed the chances of the Opposition, who, it seemed, were gathering all their strength for the contest. My brother Zouave was of opinion that an ideal Parliament was one such as we possessed at that moment. Not a single member of the Opposition; no publication of debates allowed; all the laws voted in strict privacy by two hundred Deputies, elected rather by the exertions of ninety Prefects than by that of ten million electors.—“With

such a Parliament," said he, "and a Senate to match, everything goes on swimmingly for us. No talk of reductions, no diminution of pay, and we get all the best places under Government." He lit a cigarette, and added: "If any of these Opposition howlers get in, there'll be a change of tune, you'll see. The halcyon days of the military will be over. Egad! I don't like those Liberals. A lot of canting prigs. What do they mean by saying that the Second Empire is a reign of immorality? I don't find the Second Empire immoral; do you, Brosse?"

At that moment a waiter came and said: "I believe *he* has arrived, sir." He was the Exalted Personage. I paid for the coffee, and my comrade and I hurried in to our places.

The E. P. had just taken his seat, and had got his double-barrelled glass already turned towards the stage. In the stalls there was something like a flutter of excitement amongst the spectators, who belonged to the Jockey Club or the Club of the Rue Royale, and who were on the look-out for the "star" of the piece—a Mademoiselle Pomponnine, a débutante of not more than twelve months' standing, and

whose peculiar talent, as I understood, lay in lifting her foot to a surprising height in performing our national dance. Mademoiselle Pomponnine was expected to appear in a moment or two; and, indeed, I had not been in my stall two minutes when an enthusiastic clapping of white-gloved hands by my immediate neighbours announced that she was coming.

Yes, there she came, and without more ado caught up the tune the fiddlers were playing, and launched into melody. But why did I—I, Aristide Brosse, bound as if shot at the same instant—why did I grip hold of the two arms of my stall, and stare before me like a fool? Why did two great drops of perspiration stream down my stupid face? Why did my comrade look at me and say: "Hallo, Brosse, are you ill? you're white as a sheet, man!" Why, in that flaunting, dazzling, spangled girl on the stage, who had not ten ounces of clothing upon her, whose arms and shoulders were covered with violet-powder, whose face was rouged, whose lips were smiling brazenly at the public, and whose sweet—unutterably sweet—voice was trolling a song

that made me, an old soldier, blush up to the roots of my hair?—I recognised ——; but I needn't tell you whom. I have never pronounced the name since.

I left the E. P. to take care of himself, started up and rushed out. I meant to go straight home, but in the lobby I was stopped by Fourmiceau, who had left the pit and was striding up and down, flourishing his one arm menacingly, and muttering interjections that appeared to dumbfound the waiters. On seeing me he rushed forward and stammered—“Ah, you saw her, didn't you, Captain?”

“Yes, Fourmiceau; but don't let's talk about it. Never speak on the subject to me again.”

But he paid no attention to my words; he continued to wave his arm.

“Why, who are you talking about, Fourmiceau?”

He seized me by the cuff and dragged me to a box-door, through the bull's-eye of which we could see another private box opposite. It was occupied by two cavaliers with waxed moustaches, and by a lady who was dressed like a rainbow, and was star-

ing about her with a self-possession altogether remarkable.

"That's Rose Mignon," hissed he. "Will you tell me now to cry *Vive la Conscription* and *Vive la Guerre*? What have the conscription and the war done for me? This" (and he touched his stump of an arm) "and that,"—and he pointed fiercely to Rose Mignon.

"Hush, Fourmiceau," I said. "Not so loud, There's a detective from the Rue de Jérusalem listening."

FLEUR DE LYS.

FLEUR DE LYS:

A STORY OF THE FRANCO-GERMAN WAR.

I.

ONE morning in October 1870 the town of O——, one of the oldest and most illustrious in France, underwent the humiliation of seeing a foreign army march in triumph through its streets. The event had been foreseen as inevitable more than a month beforehand; but the town was so proud and patriotic, its 'scutcheon was so bright, the roll of its achievements so teemed with great deeds, that honest burghers, who ignored strategy, had been pleased to doubt to the end, half-thinking that some miracle would interpose to save them from such crushing degradation. But O—— was not defensible, as all military men well knew. The fortifications, behind which, four centuries ago, it had stood one of the

most memorable sieges in history, had long been demolished; and as no others had been built in their place, nothing could have come of resistance but bombardment and total ruin. To spare the population these needless sufferings, the French garrison had retreated—not, indeed, without fighting, for appearance' sake and against double odds, a battle which was hopeless from the first.

And so the Prussians were tramping, with bayonets fixed and helmets glistening, through the narrow streets of the venerable city. The morning was grey and a little misty; a cold, drizzling rain had been falling during the night; and this, taken in connection with the sombre uniforms and travel-stained appearance of the invading troops, the silent throngs of spectators that bordered either side of the roadway, and the mournful notes of the cathedral bell (which happened to be tolling that morning for a funeral service), gave the solemnity much more the character of a burial procession than of a triumphal entry of conquerors. And yet there they were, conquerors notwithstanding, and with all the pride of conquest stamped on their brows. There

was no mistaking the dogged but exulting looks, the heavy, resolute tread, and that peculiar grasp of the rifle-stock which speaks of being on the watch and ready to fight again at a moment's notice; nor *did* the spectators mistake it. Singularly enough, however, the predominant feeling amongst them was evidently rather one of curiosity than of anger. The day before, the Mayor had, in great trouble of mind, covered the walls of the town with placards, beseeching the inhabitants to be calm, and not to insult their victors; but his fears on this ground proved unfounded. The crowds stared, but did not seem particularly shocked by what they saw. Perhaps during the first five minutes, whilst the vanguard of Uhlans were filing past, and a band that came behind them played the martial strains of the *Wacht am Rhein*, a murmur or two might have been heard, and a few French countenances might have been seen to turn pale; but soon this wore off. As regiment after regiment went by, and the crowd grew familiar with the faces of their foes, sensitiveness became blunted. By the end of an hour's time it had almost vanished; and, curiosity being then

cloyed, the crowd lapsed into that state when it needs but a ludicrous incident to break the ice and revive that natural propensity to be jocular which lurks within all great concourses of men; and it so chanced that the needed incident occurred.

At a spot where four roads met was a plug-hole, which, having been somehow widened, formed an insidious and dangerous foot-trap. Most of the soldiers, with Teutonic prudence, avoided it; but one less wary set his foot in it without looking, and before he could extricate himself was bumped by the man behind him, and this second man by a third; so that they all three tripped up and fell with a crash, letting go their rifles, and plunging their entire company into confusion; upon which a delighted titter broke out along the whole line of spectators. Somebody made a joke (rather feeble) about conquerors biting the dust, and the rest laughed at it. This encouraged a second wag, and then another; and from that moment all these Frenchmen stood consoled for the capture of their town, for the requisitions, and for everything else that might happen to them that day, by the thought that three

of their vanquishers had made themselves ridiculous. Happy the nation whom such episodes can cheer! The remainder of the marching past went off gaily enough. The onlookers criticised with much satisfaction, though in whispers, the cut of their enemies' coats, the poker-like rectitude of their backbones, the absence of pipe-clay on their belts, and, of course, their military tactics, which were generally voted absurd.

There was at least one person, however, among the throng whose sentiments did not undergo the same variations of cloud and sunshine as those which have just been noticed, and this was a young and fair-haired girl of twenty. In the morning—some two hours before the Prussian entry—there had driven into O—— a well-appointed carriage, drawn by two horses, and bearing an old gentleman and his daughter. This carriage stopped at a chemist's shop, then at a surgical-bandage maker's, and lastly at one of those dépôts where the appurtenances of a private ambulance might be bought—lint, linen, camp-beds, &c.; and at all these places the old man and the young girl were received with

marks of particular respect. It is true that the carriage displayed a coronet on its panels, which may account, in some way for this deference; but it is also certain that the young girl was divinely beautiful, and that had she been anybody else but a duke's daughter, it would have made little difference in the amount or in the quality of the homage which men would have strewed upon her path. There are faces towards which all men feel drawn, and whose claims to absolute worship nobody calls in question. Hers was one of them. It was a face that would have made a craven feel chivalrous, and would have spurred a naturally honourable man to deeds of valour or sacrifice such as those of which legends tell. On the other hand, Heaven help the man who should fall in love with such a face and not have his love requited! His life would become a torment, for he could never forget those features, with their sweet, grave expression—never!

The Duke—a slight, thin-visaged man of about sixty, who walked with a stiff knee and leaned for support on a stick—was essentially a French nobleman of that school who have sent the present age

to Coventry. A Legitimist he was; not cynical or morose, but one of those who can feel no sort of sympathy for modern ideas; are intimately persuaded that they will all break down; and, pending this consummation, hold aloof, washing their hands of politics and of everything else which may bring them into active contact with a world which they neither understand nor esteem. One could read his character, his prejudices, his proclivities on his face as in an open book. He was dignified, but cold; his manners were marked by the most perfect courtesy, but—except when he was talking to persons of his own rank—there was in them just the slightest tincture of sarcasm, as if he were constantly expecting that his interlocutor was going to commit himself to some outrageous proposition, and as if his not doing so were a matter of surprise to him. It is superfluous to mention that although in the month of October 1870, France was already in the enjoyment of Republican institutions, nobody would have ventured to address the Duke otherwise than by his title. Thrones might fall and constitutions vanish, kings or emperors might be deposed

and Frenchmen citizenise one another to their hearts' content; but throughout all changes and chances this nobleman was Duc de Bressac, and meant to remain so.

"Then I will have all those articles sent up to the castle, Monsieur le Duc," said the shopman of the ambulance dépôt obsequiously, as he escorted the noble customer and his daughter back to their carriage, after they had remained more than an hour making purchases.

"If you please, M. Galuche," said the Duke, hoisting himself into the carriage by the aid of his stick and his footman's arm.

"And you will try to let us have them as early as possible, M. Galuche," added Mademoiselle de Bressac, in a pleading voice.

"They shall be at the castle as soon as ever the roads are clear, Mademoiselle," answered florid M. Galuche, bowing low; and so saying, he drew out his watch. "It is now close upon twelve, Mademoiselle—as the troops are to enter in another half-hour, it would scarcely be safe to send now; the roads must be already blocked."

"But I thought the entry was not to commence till two," exclaimed the Duke in surprise. "I had timed our coming so that we might get all our shopping done, and be back before they came in."

"There was a countermand last night, M. le Duc," replied the shopkeeper, renewing his bows. "The troops were not to have come in till the afternoon. Yesterday we were enjoined to be in readiness to receive them at twelve o'clock."

M. Galuche had no very cogent reasons for detesting the war, for it had developed his particular branch of commerce in a way that was most satisfactory, and commerce was what M. Galuche naturally regarded as the *ne plus ultra* of man's aims and thoughts here below. Nevertheless, finding himself in the presence of M. de Bressac, whose views were probably not commercial, he felt it binding upon him to show that the ancient patriotism of the citizens of O—— had not degenerated in his person, so he pursued with sudden lugubriousness: "Yes; twelve o'clock—a terrible event this for our good town of O——, M. le Duc. I, for my part, have to lodge six of these brigands in my house—

I received the billet-order this morning. Six of them!" and he drew, or pretended to draw, a sigh, very miserably.

"What are we to do now?" asked M. de Bressac perplexedly of his daughter. "We shall have to remain here half the day."

"If M. le Duc will so far honour me," broke in M. Galuche, with alacrity, "I have a drawing-room above my shop where Mademoiselle could sit whilst the army was marching by. There is a capital view from the window."

"God forbid!" cried the Duke, biting his lips as if he had had a spasm; and to the unspeakable chagrin of M. Galuche he saw a look of pain flit over the nobleman's features, and indignation flash from ~~the~~ eyes of Mdle. de Bressac.

"I—a—of course did not mean that Mademoiselle should look at the march-past; that I know—a—would be too—too—distressing," blundered he, in a luckless endeavour to rectify his mistake. "I only intended to pray that Mademoiselle would do me the honour of accepting a shelter in my

house, and partaking of such humble refreshment as it is in my power to offer."

But M. Galuche was saved the trouble of further apology by a loud flourish of trumpets which resounded at the end of the street. This, he explained, had been announced the day before as a signal that the thoroughfares through which the army was to pass were instantaneously to be cleared of all their vehicles; and in effect, a minute or two later a squad of Uhlans—part of the garrison that had been holding the town for a few days past—debouched at the upper end of the street, rode down it at an amble, and directed the Duke's coachman to draw up his carriage in a by-lane. The coachman, being English, obeyed without a word; but the footman being French, and old, could not submit to this order without having recourse to the solace of numerous shrugs, muttered oaths, and argumentative pleas, to all of which demonstrations the silent, armed Uhlans paid as much attention as if he had said nothing. Under their directions the carriage was stationed in a small street that led out of the main one, and it was from this point that the

Duke and his daughter became the unwilling spectators of the saddest scene which can be given to loyal and patriot eyes.

At first M. de Bressac threw himself back in his seat without glancing either to the right or left of him, and his daughter did the same, neither speaking. But soon a kind of fascination drew the young girl's face to the window. She looked fixedly, yearningly, and with a sickening expression of sorrow; and insensibly hot tears began to course each other down her cheeks, whilst her frame trembled as if from cold.

Nobody who has not felt it can realise the sensation of seeing one's country invaded. As Mdlle. de Bressac looked, it seemed to her as if she were draining a cup of humiliation bitter enough and deep enough for a life-time. No private sorrow could ever touch her like this. Her mother's death, which had been the one great grief of her young life, had moved her less; the loss of her father, if she lived to suffer it, could not, she thought, cause her pangs more acute and lasting. The soldiers tramped by, the guns jolted over the paving-stones,

the hoofs of the horses struck the ground with almost rhythmical cadence; and these sounds, so stirring when it is a friendly cavalcade that produces them, shot throes of positive physical pain through her heart. At last she could bear it no longer, and, shivering all over, drew her head in. As she did so, she involuntarily glanced up, and her eyes encountered those of a Prussian officer, who had been gazing at her as if spellbound for more than half-an-hour.

He was a young man of about six-and-twenty, of strikingly handsome features, and eyes remarkably intelligent and mild. The tasteful light-blue uniform with white facings which he was wearing set off to advantage his strong, well-knit figure, and he bestrode a powerful charger with ease and grace. Probably he was acting in some sort as marshal, for though Mdle. de Bressac had not noticed him, he had early taken up his position in the street where the carriage stood, and, in company with six mounted soldiers, seemed to be there to keep the crowd back. No doubt, his first glance at the beautiful occupant of the brougham had been of the kind which most

men throw at pretty women; but if so, it had quickly changed. The light look of levity in his eyes faded from them, and gave place to an air of generous and manly sympathy as he watched the lovely face bathed in tears, and marked the keen traces of anguish on the young girl's features.

He threw a glance behind him to see if it would not be possible to take the carriage out of its position, and spare its owners the rest of the sight; but the alley was a blind one, and its single issue was now closed. Perceiving this, the young officer turned his eyes again with increasing pity on the weeping face, and did not take them off. He gazed at the girl with an admiration that slowly grew every minute, and which at least became so trance-like that when, towards the end, Mdlle. de Bressac withdrew her face from the carriage window and caught his eyes, he started as if from a dream, and, without appearing conscious of what he was doing, raised his white-gloved hand to his helmet, and bowed as if he were saluting a queen.

Mdlle. de Bressac did not return this salute. Coming from such a quarter, and under such cir-

cumstances, it seemed to her an insult, and caused her to flush up to the eyes. The officer had time to perceive that flush, and to guess the meaning of it, and he slightly changed colour. In a few minutes more the triumphal procession was over, and the carriage was enabled to move away. The young Prussian followed it with his eyes until it vanished round the corner of the street.

Then—no longer the same man as he had been an hour before, for what transformations may not be compassed in an hour?—he slowly rode off with his men in search of the quartermaster, to ascertain where his billet was. On his way he was far too much absorbed to notice, what he certainly would have, and *had* remarked that same morning, that more than one Frenchwoman turned round to look at him as he rode past, and to remark, “Qu’il n’avait pas mauvaise tournure pour un Prussien.”

The quartermaster was standing in front of the townhouse with lists in his hand, and a very mob of officers pressing round him. With more respect for the new applicant than his military rank actually warranted, for the young man was but a captain,

the high functionary said to him, "Herr Hauptmann, your quarters will be good ones. You are one of a party of twenty who will lodge at the Château de Bressac." Then, in a whisper, "Fine house and capital cellar, Herr Graf. The Duke is one of the richest men in this country, and his daughter, they say, is"——

But the arrival of more officers cut the remark short, and the captain had to turn his horse again. When out of the throng, he called to a workman who was leaning against a post, looking very much as if he had been consoling himself for his country's misfortunes with absinthe, and asked him for information as to where the château was.

"The Château de Bressac is not quite a league off," hiccoughed the Frenchman, with a praiseworthy attempt to look dignified and sober. "You have only to follow the road straight, and, with that horse of yours, you ought to catch up the Duke's carriage, which was here ten minutes ago. Ay, a carriage with soft cushions like mattresses," added he, drawlingly. "A pretty thing for aristos like that to be

dragged about under a Republic when good fellows like myself go on foot."

"Was it a carriage drawn by a pair of bays, and with a lady inside?" asked the Prussian.

"Ay, that's it—two bays that are fed better than many a good Republican, I'll be bound; and the lady inside was Mdlle. Fleur de Lys, the Duke's daughter."

The officer put his hand into his pocket, and threw the man a napoleon.

II.

Mdlle Fleur de Lys, or Mdlle. Lili, as people more affectionately called her, was the only child of the Duke de Bressac. She had had a brother, but he died in boyhood, and since then she had been the object upon whom all her father's affection, pride, and ambition centred. A love such as that which her father bore her would have been enough to spoil most children, but it had not spoiled her. Though she ruled supreme at Bressac, where her least whim was law, she exercised her sovereignty

sensibly, and was not renowned anywhere about the country for capriciousness or eccentricity. The only thing people said about her was that she was proud—"kind-hearted, but proud," was their term; and this estimate of her character was no bad one, if by pride was meant that she had a shrinking horror of everything that was mean or commonplace, and set up for herself an ideal of human nature that was as much above the real thing as heaven is above the earth. This was, indeed, the rock upon which a good deal of Mdlle. Lili's future peace was likely to split; for ideals are dangerous things in the navigation of life. Mdlle. Lili could not understand that the purest of human natures, like the purest of coins, contain some small particle of alloy. Having passed all the leisure hours of her girlhood reading the books of chivalry with which the old library of the castle was stored, and having ever present before her eyes the example of her own father, whose scrupulousness was so nice that it almost amounted to the pedantry of honour, she would have had every man be wholly brave, generous, courteous, and disinterested. And the worst of it was, that she gave

every man credit for these qualities before knowing him, whence it would happen that as few men—or, to speak more correctly, none—ever did full honour to the list of virtues with which she had debited them, she generally relegated them, after a few days' acquaintance, to the obscurest background of her thoughts, amongst things tried and found wanting. This was the reason why, at twenty, Mdlle. Fleur de Lys was not yet married. Suitors had wooed her in plenty; but one had seemed not quite brave; a second was too fond of money; a third's manners were bad; a fourth was brave and disinterested enough, but was prone to tattle; and so on. It must be said that, in dismissing her suitors, Mdlle. de Bressac never did so in a way that could shock them, or make them guess that they had displeased her. She was not only too well bred, but too kind and compassionate, to cause anybody wilful pain. Only when a lover failed to come up to her standard of perfection, he simply found that he made no progress in his wooing—that was all.

On coming back to Bressac from the town of O——, Mdlle. Fleur de Lys was in a state of fever-

ish agitation, such as her father had never known her in before. What most shocked her in the cruel spectacle of the morning was the attitude of the inhabitants. "To think," cried she, clasping her hands in an intensity of bitterness—"to think that there were young men in those crowds, men of twenty and thirty, who were not ashamed to come out on the pavements to stare at our enemies and jeer at them! To jeer, when they had not the courage to fight! Oh, cowardice, treble cowardice of men! Where has all the chivalry of France flown? Why, in a war like this, every house ought to have become a fortress, every village a citadel. Battlements? What need had we of them if our men had been fearless and resolved to face death, as the women and children of Saragossa did in fighting against us? France outdone in valour by a small Spanish town! We are not only beaten, we are dishonoured. No woman will ever be able to look at Frenchmen and feel proud of them. We have fallen so low in spirit, that fifty years hence men will ask of what clay their fathers were made to have patiently stood all this." Here she broke out into sobs, and her father tried

to appease her; but it was not much of an effort, for the Duke was too painfully disgusted himself with the tameness shown by his countrymen to be able to find many excuses for them. Those degrading hauls, as he called them, of a hundred thousand armed prisoners at a time, those meek surrenders of large cities, those incredible acts of subservience on the part of corporate bodies, and, worse than all, the rampant bragging of press and public orators, which added ridicule to what was already contemptible enough, filled him with dismay. All that he could find as a palliation for so much shame was the argument that France had become crazed, and was no longer herself. "The people have gone speech-mad," he would say resignedly. "When we see a country like this being governed by a dozen cracked barristers, it means that the age of action is past. Government, nowadays, signifies quibbling. The first time a nation of fighting men turns round on us, we must obviously go to the wall, as we are doing now. And it is useless organising armies," added he. "Why should peasants or workmen go out to fight? The barristers who govern us have

taught them that there is no such thing as God, no religion, no family, no property; that all men are equal, and owe no respect to one another; that all nations are one, and that the idea of a separate allegiance to a mother country is an antiquated barbarism. Good—then why risk one's life? If there is nothing in one's country worth defending, if a man is to worship only himself, then the soundness of his own skin must evidently be his paramount object, and he had better see to it." Nevertheless, the Duke had subscribed largely to the organisation of the armies in which he did not believe; and he would certainly have enlisted himself, had it not been for his lameness (due to a wound in a duel twenty years before), which precluded his being of any use. As it was, he would have been quite ready to defend his own castle; but he and his daughter would have had to defend it alone, for at the first hint of barricading the castle, the servants had with one voice declared their intention of being no participators, in such rashness. To be sure, there was one dissentient—the English coachman. Judging the thing from a cool and phlegmatic point of

view, the functionary expressed his readiness to fight if his Grace pleased, but "didn't see the use of it."

Happily Mdlle. de Bressac had domestic details to attend to on her return from O——, which obliged her to rouse herself from the state of prostration to which the morning's events had reduced her. Declining to join in the popular cry as to Prussian brigands, clock-robbers, and the rest of it, the Duc de Bressac had decided that the officers billeted upon him should be received with all the regard due to valiant opponents. It was only a lawyers' government, he said, which could seek to traduce courageous enemies by accusing them of filching. So Mdlle. Fleur de Lys had to see that the twenty best bed-rooms in the castle and all the state apartments were prepared as though to receive honoured guests, the Duke merely reserving for himself and his daughter a small suite of rooms in the most retired part of the house. Then, when this was done, Mdlle. Fleur de Lys donned a white apron and went into a wing of the castle which had been converted into an ambulance, and where half-a-dozen

French officers and soldiers, wounded in the battle near O——, were being tended. Amongst the private soldiers was a cousin of Mdlle. de Bressac's, the Marquis de Criquetot.

He was fairly rich, this pale marquis of eight-and-twenty, and during the halcyon period of the Second Empire had devoted his mind to horse-racing. He was generally to be met with either at Chantilly or Newmarket, with an eyeglass screwed carefully into his left eye, a dust-coat thrown over his arm, and the gilt clasp of a betting-book peeping out of his breast-pocket. There were few races run without a horse of his appearing at the post, and few horses of his appeared at the post without being beaten. This, however, did not seem to interfere much with his enjoyment of the sport, and he continued a fervent follower of it, until one summer being on a visit to Bressac, he was so smitten with his cousin's charms, that he forthwith sold his stud, discarded his eyeglass, threw his betting-book into the fire, and begged permission of the Duke to sue for his daughter's hand. He was in the very midst of his courtship when the war broke out. Thinking

the army would swallow up the Prussians easily enough without him, he did not in the first instance stir; but after Woerth, when Government appealed to all the men of goodwill in France, Mdlle. Fleur de Lys sent him to enlist as a private soldier, and away he went just as he would have gone and thrust his head into a cannon's mouth had she bidden him. He fought at Sedan and was taken prisoner, but escaped. Then he joined an army in course of formation in the provinces, and conducted himself with such gallantry, that M. Gambetta offered him a colonelcy, which he declined, and the cross of honour, which he accepted. At the battle of O——, a bullet discharged from a Bavarian rifle fractured his collar-bone, and for the moment cut his military career short.

Had the young soldier been in any other ambulance, there is no doubt he might have repined over this mishap, but as things were he managed to bear up. His wound was not dangerous, only troublesome and requiring rest, and this rest he gave it by lounging on a sofa with his right arm in a sling, smoking a good deal, and when his cousin

or his uncle were not there to talk with him, reading novels. He was engaged in this way when Fleur de Lys de Bressac glided into his room with one of the potions which doctors prescribed for him, and which he drank with faith because she mixed them. Dressed in black merino, with neat white collar and cuffs, and her rich masses of auburn hair sheltered by a small white crape cap, she looked as sweet a personification of an ambulance nurse as it was possible to conceive. Moving across the room with noiseless steps, she came to her cousin's side and laid down her tray on the table near him; then in the gentle voice that always made him thrill, she said: "Do you feel better, mon cousin?"

He had thrown away his cigarette and laid down his book on her entrance.

"I always feel better when you are here, and relapse when you are out of sight," he answered, half-seriously, half-gaily. "But tell me, cousin, your eyes are red; you have been crying?"

"Yes," she said, with a faint sigh, and began to stir his potion in its teacup. "Cousin, you must



drink this. It is a little bitter, but the doctor says it will make you sleep."

He quaffed the drug as if it had been the divinest nectar, taking several draughts to make the pleasure last longer. Then he wiped his lips and exclaimed: "It is better than burgundy, cousin."

Whilst he was drinking, Fleur de Lys had mechanically taken up the book he had been reading. It was one of M. Théophile Gautier's popular productions. On seeing the title she laid it down again and turned a silent but eloquent glance of surprise and sorrow at him: "Novelettes!" she said at length, "I did not think you could have the heart to read such things as this now."

He did not seem to understand, and held the handkerchief he had been carrying to his lips midway in the air, astonished: "Why, it's a volume of Gautier's, cousin."

"Gautier's tales, whilst the Prussians are flaunting their standard in our town of O——, whilst they are on their way to take up their quarters in this very house!" she rejoined. "I can see, cousin, that the modern doctrines of internationalism must have

struck very deep if a man of your birth feels so lightly for his country's ruin."

He turned red, and answered, a little abashed: "Don't be hard on me, cousin. Time hangs so heavy on my hands when you are not here, that I must needs find a way of killing it. Besides, I have not read much: see, here is the book-marker in the third page. I always think of something else whilst I am reading now."

"And there is only one thing of which you should think," she replied coldly: "the preparing yourself for the day when we shall avenge these outrages that have been put upon us. Who is to set the example of regenerating our country if not our class? You refused a colonelcy on the field because you said you were not fit for it, and if you thought so you acted honourably. But why do not fit yourself? If I were a man I would not rest until I had learned military tactics and the language of our enemies, so as to be ready for the day when we shall re-invade *their* country."

There was a pause. The young soldier looked



dejectedly at his bandaged arm, and stroked his forehead thoughtfully with his free hand.

"I am afraid I belong to a poor generation, cousin," he said, in a low voice. "But you must guide me. I can do what I am told to do, and I will obey you. This is the last time I shall open a novel until I have learned German and the drill-book."

"If every gentleman in France did the same, you would be revenged in less than five years," she exclaimed, with vehemence.

"Perhaps every gentleman in France would, if he had you to command him, cousin," was his smiling answer; and as Fleur de Lys's hand still rested on the table, he raised it to his lips and kissed it.

"Yes, but you will not have discharged all your duty, cousin," she continued, gently disengaging herself, "even when you have repaid our enemies, blow for blow, all they have done to us. A gentleman should devote himself to exterminating those blasphemous and disloyal theories that have brought us so low. What they call universal suffrage is an

impiety. It is handing over a great nation, with traditions and a name, to the custody of all who are ignorant, debased, and corrupt. The people are like children. They should be ruled and protected against themselves by the classes who have education and religion."

This time the marquis's face assumed a rather rueful expression. "I make no doubt of our soon turning the tables upon the Prussians," he remarked; "but to wage a war against universal suffrage is—is"—

"Is what?" she asked, proudly.

But he was spared the unpleasantness of explaining what he meant; for at that moment there was a knock at the door, and a servant entered. It was the same footman who had driven into O—— with the carriage in the morning; one of those old French servants dressed in impossible liveries that never fit them, and with a grumbling, patronisingly familiar tone, that always makes one doubt whether they are not going to sit down by your side after handing the dishes round. On the strength of his having been an incalculable number of years in the

family, this footman felt himself privileged to act chorus, as it were, to all the conversations, carried on within his hearing. Before the war, he had been generally regarded as a successful copy of Caleb Balderstone, whose virtues would prove to be shining gold on the day of trial; but when the day of trial came, in the shape of the Duke's proposal to entrench himself in his castle, and defend it to the last drop of his own and his servants' blood, Jean-Baptiste Barbecruche revealed unmistakably that, if he liked the Duke, there was somebody he loved still better, and that was himself. Nevertheless, he was not aware that his candid display of egotism had disappointed anybody, or cooled in the smallest degree his employer's faith in his perfections; so that it was in much his usual tone of having pondered the orders he had been commissioned with, and being unable to vouchsafe them his approval, that, addressing his young mistress, he said:—"Mademoiselle, M. le Duc has sent me to say that he begs you to come downstairs and assist him in receiving those Prussians. To receive those people in state, can you understand that? For my part, it disgusts me; and I

said to M. le Duc, 'Rather than face a Prussian, Monseigneur, I would shut myself up in the kitchen, and live there six weeks.' But Monseigneur purposes to hand over all his keys to them, and to beg their permission to live in retirement during their presence. Beg their permission, forsooth! just as if they were masters, and we, the owners of the castle, were nobodies! Said I to Monsieur le Duc, 'Truly things have come to a pretty pass, Monseigneur, when I, an old servant, receive such orders as that!' But Monseigneur told me to mind my own business; and he begs, Mademoiselle, that you will not delay, as a detachment of officers were already riding up the avenue. Yes, and I saw them myself through a window coming up—a jolter-headed lot, with cannibal faces; scoundrels that'll be getting drunk off our wines, and sprawling with their muddy boots on our best beds. Ah, the scamps, the cut-throats, the"——

"I think that is enough," cried Mdlle. de Bres-sac, stopping him with a wave of the hand, and turning on him a glance of cool contempt. "You will have earned the right to insult those soldiers,

Jean-Baptiste, when you have had the spirit to defy them. Meanwhile, you will have to learn this lesson, that those who have not the heart to fight, must have the courage to slave. During all the time that the Prussian officers remain in this house, you will wait upon them every day, and do it respectfully. If you prefer shutting yourself up in a kitchen, you are free to follow your choice, but you will select some other kitchen than that of Bressac."

A lashing with a whip could not have more completely disconcerted and cowed the unfortunate Jean-Baptiste. He opened his lips to speak; but meeting the eyes of his mistress fixed on him implacably, as if awaiting an answer, he judged it prudent to say nothing. It was only when Mdlle. de Bressac had swept out of the room, after nodding slightly to her cousin, that he summed up his impressions by lifting his hands ceiling-wards and exclaiming, "Bandits de Prussiens! It's they who are the cause of all this. If our poltroon army had only fought like men! But soldiers are hares, nowadays. In my time it was very different!" And

forgetting the wounded Marquis de Criquetot, who had enjoyed the benefit of this remark, and was smiling at it, he repeated, "Ay, ay, very different!" and shuffled, mumbling, downstairs.

Half an hour later the entrance-hall of Bressac was the scene of a gathering such as the old walls of the castle, and the pictures of mailed knights that hung upon them, must have witnessed with a stupefaction unparalleled in the course of their inanimate existence. The Duke de Bressac, attired in black, and with his daughter by his side, was standing at a table on which lay a few large keys. Behind him, in a half circle, were ranged his household; and facing this group thronged a showy cluster of Prussian officers, whose steel spurs and heavy scabbards clanked on the marble of the tessellated flooring. There had been a little uneasiness on the faces of these officers as they neared the castle. They were not sure what kind of reception would be given them; and though quite able and ready to over-ride sulkiness, or any other form of active or passive antagonism, they naturally preferred that their relations with such a man as the Duke de

Bressac should be exempt from disagreeable incidents. And in this they were not disappointed. The Duke bowed to them with courtesy, and was answered by that peculiarly formal yet not ungraceful salute which is in usage in the Prussian army. Then, speaking to them in his own tongue and with a voice that quavered but little, all things considered, he said,—

“Gentlemen, the hazards of war have brought you as masters into a house where, under other circumstances, I should have been glad to receive you as guests. I shall not importune you much with my presence whilst you are here, for my daughter and I will beg your permission to keep to our own apartments; but the rest of the house will be yours. My steward has orders to take your pleasure, and will deliver you these keys. This particular key (and he drew one from his pocket) is that of a gallery of heirlooms. You will allow me, General, to remit it to you in person.” And, stepping forward, he tendered it to the chief officer present, who turned it over once or twice in his hands, reddened—but eventually pocketed it.

A pin might have been heard to drop whilst this scene was being enacted. Then the Duke gave his arm to his daughter and made for the door, the officers parting in two rows to the right and left of them, and raising their hands to their helmets. But just as the party were on the threshold an officer darted out of the throng, picked up a glove which had been left on the table, and, hurrying after Mdle. de Bressac, said in French, "You have forgotten your glove, Mademoiselle."

She bent her head to thank him, and recognised the same officer whom she had seen that morning. He also wore the same expression on his face which had displeased her then. But somehow it did not displease her now, for, stopping to take the glove from his hand, she noticed that that hand shook, and that there were tears in his eyes.

III.

"I cannot make out what has come over Leoneizen," exclaimed fat Hauptmann Maximilian

Koch, some six weeks after this, one evening at mess in the castle dining-room.

"Very singular," protested another fat Hauptmann, Ferdinand von Schweippe, cutting up a plump and tender quail; "he doesn't eat."

"Nor drink," ejaculated a third Hauptmann, rosy and tall, raising to his lips a glass of the Duke de Bressac's rubiest claret.

"The fact is," laughed handsome, slim-waisted Lieutenant von Wespe, with a glance round him to see that there were none but his brother officers present,—*"the fact is, Leoneizen is in love. I am sure of it."*

"A man who is in love should eat and drink twice more than a man who isn't, for love wastes," remarked tremendously corpulent Colonel Herr Graf von Wurstspatzen; and as he was the presiding officer that evening, and had laughed whilst uttering his joke, all the other officers laughed with him in concert. This, by the way, is the rule. A colonel laughs, everybody laughs. Discipline could not exist without it.

"But whom does he love?" inquired Hauptmann Koch, between two mouthfuls of game.

"Yes, let's have the name!" gobbled the second fat Hauptmann, much relishing his plump bird.

"Ah, that's *his* secret," laughed the slim Lieutenant. "One mustn't betray."

"A love-secret is no secret," exclaimed the tall and rosy Hauptmann, helping himself to more claret. "Those things always transpire."

"And if they don't, the parties best pleased are not always the lovers themselves," observed the corpulent Colonel, with a new laugh. At which the whole table guffawed again like one man.

"Since the Herr Colonel is of that opinion, I may as well say that one need not have many pairs of eyes to guess who is the beauty that has turned our friend's head," sniggered the slim Lieutenant.

"I have guessed already," said, with a broad smile, Hauptmann Otto Nädelaugen, a penetrating round-faced Hauptmann, with spectacles. "It is"——

"Hush!" whispered all the officers together; for the door had opened, and the footman, Jean-Baptiste

Barbecruche, was sailing in with a tray covered with sweet dishes. By this time J. B. Barbecruche had thought better of his resolution of never facing the Prussians. Between his patriotism and the prospect of losing his place at Bressac the worthy man had not long hesitated. His sentiments had even flown with rapidity from one extreme to the other, and he now got on capitally with cannibal-visaged foemen whom his French soul had execrated. He was garrulous, civil, and confidential, and was good enough to patronise his new masters as he had done his old ones.

"*Charlotte Russe, or Plom-pouding au rhom, Monsieur le Comte?*" he asked, pausing on the Colonel's left; "let me advise Monsieur le Comte to try the *plom-pouding*; our *chef* has excelled himself."

"You don't happen to have seen M. le Capitaine de Leoneizen, have you, M. Jean-Baptiste?" asked the penetrating Hauptmann with the spectacles. "He is missing at our board."

"Pardon me, mon Capitaine, M. le Comte de Leoneizen was seated in the Pagoda Garden, draw-

ing, almost all the afternoon. It is true that at dusk I lost sight of him. Perhaps he is gone to the town."

"Perhaps," echoed Hauptmann Nädelaugen. But when M. Jean-Baptiste had retired, after disposing of his dainties and uncorking more bottles of Pomard, Chambertin, and Château Lafitte, the same Hauptmann re-exclaimed, with his spectacles beaming, "The Pagoda Garden! This is the twentieth time I have seen or heard of Leoneizen in the Pagoda Garden. It is that which adjoins the private orchard, where the snow-like Fräulein Fleur de Lys takes her walks; also there is a footpath skirting it, which leads to the village of Bressac, where the Fräulein goes often to tend the sick."

"Ha! ha!" laughed the officers.

"Heh! heh!" winked the Colonel. "Nädelaugen talks as if he had been reconnoitring the enemy's citadel on his own account, and found it already invested." At which pleasantry, as usual, there was an immense deal of merriment. "However," continued the Herr Colonel von Wurstspatzen, filling his glass, "if one of the King's officers can carry

back to Germany as his bride the Fräulein Fleur de Lys, he will have made his Majesty present of as fair a subject as any in all beautydom. It will be a conquest like Metz. Here's to the health of the conqueror!" and the good-humoured corpulent Count von Wurstspatzen drained his glass dry and smacked his lips after it.

Of course, everybody followed suit in the toast, for, as in laughing, so in drinking; when the Colonel drinks everybody drinks, this being a necessity of discipline. But when the penetrating Hauptmann with the spectacles had set back his glass on the tablecloth, after exclaiming, "To the conqueror!" he turned his shining spectacles on his superior, and said, grinning: "I have drunk, Herr Colonel, but I do not think it is one of us who will carry away the fair Fräulein. That wounded Marquis, who is our prisoner on parole, the Herr von Criquetot, seems to think and dream only of her—yet, to be sure, she does not appear to think only of him. They are cousins, and go as brother and sister together."

"I saw them walking in the garden the other day, he with his right arm in a sling, she leaning

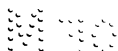
on the other arm," remarked the tall, rosy Hauptmann, who had become more rosy still from the claret. "There is that in a woman's mere way of walking with a man," added he, pensively, "which soon whispers to the observer whether she is in love or not—and the Fräulein Fleur de Lys is not in love with the Herr Criquetot."

"The Herr Criquetot is learning German and drilling," observed the slim Lieutenant von Wespe, as if he thought the thing a good joke. "He stammers German with everybody he can find, and it has got about through these French servants, who spy their masters so well, that he is doing this to please the Fräulein his cousin, and in view of the '*jour de la revanche!*'" And the slim Lieutenant struck what he conceived to be a French attitude of "*revanche!*" by waving one hand above his head and making his eye-balls flame.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed all the officers together, greatly amused.

"We are to hear, then, of the Field-Marshal Criquetot crossing the Rhine and besieging Mayence"—

"To take a ham," interrupted the Colonel. And



this joke was thought so transcendent that it provoked peal upon peal, and appropriately closed the banquet.

The officers were still laughing over the Field-Marshal Criquetot and his ham, when, with their caps jauntily perched on the side of their heads, and the middle buttons of their tight tunics unfastened, they sauntered into the conservatory, which led out of the dining-room, to take coffee and to smoke.

IV.

Meanwhile, the several persons who had been made the subjects of the mess-room conversation were engaged in their respective occupations, and for reasons best known to themselves were not so happy as their critics. The young Count Leoneizen, to begin with. Leaning against a tree, through the dry branches of which whistled a keen December wind, this young officer—for whom more than one female heart had beaten, and was, perhaps, beating then, unrequited, at Berlin or Cologne—was strain-

ing his eyes to see as far as possible in the night down a dark road, at the end of which twinkled, like one small lamp, the lights of the village of Bressac. Every night the Count Leoneizen came to this tree and gazed down the dark road, for every afternoon Mdle. de Bressac, attended by her maid, went to the village to carry help and comfort to the sick or wounded, who were being tended in the cottages, and it was seldom that she returned before dusk. So every day the young officer, wrapped in his cloak, leaned against the tree to watch. It pleased him to think that he was in some way guarding over the safety of the woman he loved—that no one could harm her whilst he was there; that, unknown to her, a stout heart and a strong arm were surveying her footsteps, and waiting to shield her at the cost of life from the slightest insult or danger. He had never spoken to her, and never tried to do so. He knew that his love was a hopeless one. Without exchanging a word with Fleur de Lys, he had convinced himself that, even if she were to love him above everything else on earth, she would never give him her hand. Three months before, Friedrich von

Leoneizen had started upon the war flushed and eager with hopes of promotion and dignities: what were these to him now? What would he not have given could France and Germany have remained at peace—ay, even if he had never won an honour in his life, so that he should only have been free to woo Fleur de Lys as his wife? But it was no use wishing. The greatest happiness he could expect now was to come and watch for Fleur de Lys' going and coming every day. By these means he saw her five minutes in every twenty-four hours—and it was enough.

And yet there were days when his slight happiness was cruelly marred for him; and on the evening when his brother officers were making merry at his expense, he was leaning against his tree with all the pangs of jealousy gnawing at his heart. He could bear to think of Fleur de Lys never being his, but that she should become another's was a thought that maddened him. On this afternoon he had seen her for the third or fourth time go by, not with her maid, but with M. de Criquetot, who was now well enough to take short walks; and the handsome,

strong, and amorous German did not easily imagine that Fleur de Lys could love such a dandified, insignificant person as this French marquis appeared to him to be; yet he knew enough of French marriages to be aware that M. de Criquetot might very well win Mdle. de Bressac without her being more fond of him than of a pet lap-dog. So he clenched his fists till the nails almost ran into the flesh; and the wind seemed to him more bleak and moanful that night than ever; and the country around, enshrouded in its stillness, looked inexpressibly desolate and sepulchral.

But if Count Leoneizen was depressed, things fared little better with his French rival. In fact, they fared worse, for the German had at least the consolation of knowing that if his passion was hopeless, the fault was not his, but that of events; whereas the Marquis, who perceived that he was making no advance in his suit, was fain to adopt as the reason that he had not the qualities in him which make a man loved. Fleur de Lys was always kind to him. Her manner was gentle and sisterly; and he felt little doubt that if he asked her to be his wife, she

would consent, to reward him for having gone so obediently and risked his life at her bidding. But he was too generous to require of her anything in the nature of a sacrifice. He wished to be loved, and, failing that, he had strength and chivalry enough to support his disappointment nobly. It is only little hearts that can bear a grudge against a woman for not loving them; generous minds have ever such a sense of their own inferiority beside the woman they worship, that they are prepared for indifference as almost their due. Yet Louis de Criquetot would have been glad to ascertain whether his cousin's indifference towards him was of a kind which might be dispelled by patience on his part, or whether her heart was engaged to anybody else. All he knew was, that of late a change seemed to have come over her. She was quieter, more absorbed. Sometimes, sitting with work in her lap, she would pause five minutes between two stitches; and during those five minutes, a vague, desponding expression would steal into her eyes, and she would gaze before her as if unconscious of anybody's presence. Then some movement would

startle her, and make her resume her sewing, with a blush mantling on her cheek.

All these symptoms could be perceptible only to a lover's eyes. To others, Mdle. de Bressac was what she had always been; though perhaps there were some of the more observant amongst the others who did notice that Mdle. de Bressac was not quite the same in her remarks upon the war as a month or two ago. The news of lost battles still made her turn pale; at the recital of horrors suffered by the inhabitants of ruined villages she still shed tears of compassion; but in talking with her cousin about the future of France, she no longer spoke of the necessity of Frenchmen being prepared to resist invasions, and seldom of the necessity of their invading others; which change was naturally attributed to a prudent wish not to compromise herself in the hearing of any of those ubiquitous spies which Count Bismarck was supposed to hold in his service.

The Marquis had escorted his cousin to the village at her own request, because she thought that the walk might do him good; otherwise he would not have intruded himself, for he was growing

sensitive lest she might think he meant to importune her with his attentions. But the invitation, being the third or fourth in succession, had touched and pleased him; and whilst Fleur de Lys was helping to dress the wound of a stalwart young cottager, whom a fragment of shell had laid low, he sat by a spluttering wood-fire, that was wreathing clouds of cheerless yellow smoke, and watched her.

Watched her as only lovers can watch, and with an aching heart to think that so much grace and beauty could never be his. The cottage was a wretchedly mean one—one of those hovels common in the centre and west of France, where a whole family are lodged in a single room, which has a stall in the corner of it for a cow. And yet Fleur de Lys' presence lit up this sty as if it were a palace chamber.

As she stood leaning over the sick man's bed, and applying bandages with the light touch and womanly care of one whose soul is in her work, she looked beautiful and lovable beyond what she had ever seemed to her cousin when dressed in silks and pearls. What jewels, indeed, can rival the lustre of

a woman's eyes when performing an office of charity? M. de Criquetot, as he sat with his elbow resting on his knee and his head buried in his hand, thought with bitterness of his wasted life, which had sown in him the germ of no single great quality that could charm and win a noble woman. Whilst he was thus immersed in his reflections, the dressing of the wound came to an end, and the patient blurted out, in grateful but energetic *patois*, "You cannot think what good you are doing me, Mademoiselle!"

"May the Virgin bless you, my good young lady," took up the man's wife in a brogue quite as strong. "I sometimes think, though, you must be the blessed Virgin in person."

M. de Criquetot rose, and was assisting Fleur de Lys to put on her grey hood and cloak.

"You have everything you want now, Mère Marchelat?" she asked, buttoning the cloak, which covered her completely, like a nun's dress.

"Everything, Mademoiselle, thanks to Heaven and you. Monsieur Galuche, of the ambulance dépôt at O——, sent us more linen yesterday; and

M. Jean Baptiste came down from the castle with wine this morning. Then, as to tobacco"—— But here the woman stopped short, and bit her lips as if she had committed a blunder.

"What about tobacco?" asked Mdlle. de Bressac; "Marchelat must smoke his pipe." And, drawing out her purse, she went up to an earthenware tobacco-jar that stood on a shelf, "This is to buy you tobacco; but mind, you must not smoke too much, mon ami." And saying this, she raised the lid of the jar, to drop her coin in; but the jar was already full to the brim, and sticking out of the fresh tobacco was the bowl of a new, handsomely-carved brier-root pipe.

The woman was biting the corner of her apron, the man in the bed looked sheepish.

"What a fine pipe!" exclaimed Mdlle. de Bressac, taking it out and examining it. "The carving of these figures on it is admirable; but it is not a French pipe. I have seen things like it—let me see, where? Yes, it was in the Hartz mountains of Germany."

The woman, who had grown distressfully red, sprang forward, clasping her hands.

"Oh, forgive us, Mademoiselle. We know we did wrong; but we won't accept anything of them again!"

"Forgive you for what?" asked Fleur de Lys.

"I mean, Mademoiselle, you had made us all promise in the village, two months ago, when the Prussians were coming, that we would accept nothing whatever of them, but that when we had need of anything we should come to the castle for it; and believe me, Mademoiselle, we would never have taken anything from the others—no, we would sooner have died—but this one is not like the others; believe me, he is not."

"No," groaned the man in the bed; "he is not like the others."

Fleur de Lys restored the pipe to its place.

"Whom do you mean by 'this one'?" she inquired; and somehow it seemed to the Marquis that her voice trembled a little.

"We do not know his name," whimpered the woman, still distressed; "but he wears a light-blue

coat, and has such a handsome face, and such mild eyes, that you would never take him for a Prussian. The other day, young Michel, the hump-backed son of our neighbour Ribot, fell down the sand-pit half-a-league off here, and his mother was almost beside herself after nightfall, when he didn't come back, and she couldn't learn what had become of him. Well, towards eleven, when the whole village were already talking about it, and running right and left to make inquiries, this Prussian arrived, carrying the hunchback in his arms, as if he had been a child. There was nothing but a sprained ankle; only Michel might have remained in the pit a week if the Prussian hadn't heard him shout, and scrambled down all amongst the mud and gravel to help him out. After that he took to coming every day to see the Ribots and to talk with Michel; and that's how he got to hear of us. It's a sort of angel dressed up as a brigand, that Prussian is, Mademoiselle. He has all the gentleness of a woman with the strength of a lion, and when he talks to Marchelat, he says just the things that pick him up and prevent him from feeling down-hearted. Then he knows every-

thing. He told us how to plant our vegetables in the garden there, so that they might get more of the sun and be bigger; then he showed us that by hanging that sheet of tin slantwise under the mantelshelf there, the chimney would leave off smoking; and he got up himself on a ladder, and nailed that bit of board over the hole in the ceiling, where the rain used to come in. And for all that, he has that about him, Mademoiselle, that you never feel tempted to call him anything but Monsieur or Mon Capitaine. Ah, if Marchelat and his comrades had had officers like that, they would have been eating their soup in Berlin by this time."

Mdlle. de Bressac said nothing. There was only—her cousin remarked—a slight nervous shaking of her fingers as she fastened the last button of her cloak.

The woman Marchelat looked for a reply, and doubtless misinterpreting the expression of Fleur de Lys' face and the passing quiver of the lips, ejaculated, with sudden fire in her eyes, "But what is that Prussian to us, Mademoiselle, if we are to offend you by seeing him? Say but the word, and

I fling this tobacco and pipe into the road-way, and never let the man cross our threshold again:" and with a spring she snatched the jar off the shelf, and dashed the casement open ready to throw——

But Fleur de Lys quickly stopped her. "No," she faltered; "keep the things, Mère Marchelat, and——and——continue to see this officer. I think we are a little late, mon cousin," added she hurriedly; and bidding the cottagers a hasty good-night, she took her cousin's arm and hastened out.

There was no moon or stars; the night was black, and seemed to threaten snow. Recent frosts had rendered the ground so hard that it was like treading on solid granite. For a few minutes, M. de Criquetot and Fleur de Lys walked along in silence. Why the Marquis kept silent he would have found it hard to explain; but there is an instinct in these things which warns us when to speak and when to restrain ourselves. On her side, Fleur de Lys could not have spoken, if she would. The faculty of speech seemed for the moment to have forsaken her. So they proceeded together until M. de Criquetot abruptly paused, and said, as though

remembering something, "By the way, cousin, we were to have gone to four cottages, and we have only been to three."

"Dear me! We have forgotten the Merciers," she murmured, starting from her reverie. "I had promised to bring them a hundred francs for their cottage repairs, and they will be expecting me. But it is almost a kilomètre distant, I think."

"Yes," he answered, "and you are tired enough as it is, cousin. Cannot these people wait?"

"They will be disappointed," she replied, shaking her head, "and perhaps be unhappy all the night."

"Well, if that is to be the case, I had better go and carry them the money myself. You can go back to Marchelat's cottage, and rest there half-an-hour, and I will take you up on my return."

"But it is already seven," she exclaimed, opening her cloak to consult her watch, "and papa will be waiting dinner for us; he will feel alarmed." She hesitated some moments, and then added, "I think the best way, cousin, will be for you to carry the money, as you suggest, and I will walk on to the

castle alone. The distance is not great, and the roads are safe. Nobody would hurt me."

"Hurt you, no," he rejoined, half to himself. "A man would be more than a fiend who could do that."

Still, safe as he believed the roads to be, he was naturally loth to abandon his cousin alone, and after dark; and began pondering whether there were no alternative between this and disappointing the Merciers. But he could hit upon nothing; so that, after reiterated assurances on the part of Fleur de Lys that she really was not afraid, but would go anywhere and at any hour confident in the chivalry of the neighbourhood, he received from her a small parcel she had made of her hundred francs, and set off with it, running.

Then she pursued her way alone.

And yet not alone; for how was it that on this particular road she felt secure, as she did on no other? How was it that though Friedrich Leoneizen had never been seen by her standing on his silent night-vigils, she was as conscious of his presence as

though it had been revealed to her day after day by some visible token?

There had been no love-letters; no words exchanged. His love had been voiceless, respectful, concealed. How was it that its least impulses were as well known to her as though they had been breathed into her ear by the tenderest language of passion? how was it that his inmost thoughts had echoed within her heart as if they had been whispered utterances?

Fleur de Lys walked along with her eyes cast on the ground and a quickening step. She felt the tutelary presence near her, following her, guarding her. She blushed and her heart throbbed; yet she must make no sign that she knew or felt anything. She must never let it be seen that the strong secret love that had twined itself round her being was known or suspected as it was.

So she walked, drawing her cloak close round her, and shivering a little, perhaps from the cold. And when she had gone some five hundred yards between the two stiff hedgerows that bordered the narrow way, she arrived at a turning. Here the

road grew more narrow and more dark; but she continued bravely, and was not alarmed by the sight of two men who came tramping towards her with sticks and bundles over their shoulders, and pipes in their mouths. The men parted, one to either side of her, fingered the képis they were wearing, and wished her a rather queer good-night. Then they stopped, turned round to look after her, as if they were surprised to see a well-dressed woman out so late, removed the pipes from their mouths, and began to confer.

Evidently it was not an honest conference; one had only to look at the men to see that. The repeated defeats of the provincial armies had flooded the war-country with hordes of individuals, who, having been burned out of house or home, and feeling little inclination to continue fighting for a hopeless cause, under generals in whom they had no faith, had given themselves up entirely to marauding. A much more dangerous class than the fiercest bands of Uhlans, were these gentry. They broke into deserted houses, attacked defenceless wayfarers, poached, plundered hen-roosts, and when

booty was scarce, destroyed all they could lay hands on, fences, abandoned furniture, cottages, all apparently for the simple pleasure of the thing. It was easy to recognise these patriots by their bragging voices and their tattered military clothes; for the better part of them were Mobiles, and the worst scum of the routed armies. The two men who met Fleur de Lys were of this category. They must have been taken to serve against their will, and have seized the first convenient occasion for levanting; for both were young men, only weak striplings, blear-eyed and pale faced, like the lowest types of workmen in great cities.

Their conference did not last long. They shook the ashes out of their pipes, slipped the pipes into their pockets, and stealthily retraced their footsteps. Then Friedrich Leoneizen, whose watch-tree was precisely at the corner where the two roads joined, and whose eyes had from the first moment riveted themselves on the two vagabonds, crept noiselessly along under cover of the hedge and followed them. A great thrill of joy had gone through him as soon as the designs of these men had become evident.

Fleur de Lys was alone; he would protect her. Glancing at his supposed antagonists, and then on his own powerful limbs, he could not help laughing a short grim laugh, saying to himself: "If you venture to touch a hair of her head, if you so much as speak an uncivil word to her, I pity you." And with this he unfastened the clasp of his cloak, so as to be unhampered.

The two tramps accosted Fleur de Lys and whined: "Have pity on two poor soldiers who are wounded and have not got enough to carry them home, Madame."

"Two soldiers who have fought in all the battles of this war, Madame," took up the scraggiest of the two.

Without a trace of fear on her countenance, Fleur de Lys turned round, drew out her purse, and was in the act of opening it, when the man who had last spoken made a grab at it and snatched it out of her hand; whilst the second raised his fist to strike the young girl and push her back. But this second performer had reckoned without his host, for before his hand had had time to descend, or even

to move an inch, Friedrich Leoneizen had sprung through the hedge, and with a terrific back-hand blow with the pommel of his sword, which he had disdained to unsheath, caused the man to measure his full length on the ground. Then catching the other fellow by the throat, he gripped him so tight between his like hands that the unhappy wretch's tongue protruded from his mouth and his eyes from their sockets. At the third tough grip he was lying beside his compeer, doubled up like an empty sack, and senseless. All this was done in less than half a minute; and then the Prussian, passing in one instant from the extreme of rage to the extreme of calm, stood deferentially uncovered and holding out her purse to Fleur de Lys.

"Here is your purse, Mademoiselle. You have not been over-frightened, I trust?"

"Thank you, Monsieur," she said in a low voice, and pressing her hand to her side; but she did not answer the latter part of his question.

"Will you do me the honour to accept my arm for the rest of the way?" he continued, or

rather faltered, for emotion was beginning to gain on him.

With a slight inclination of the head she signed to him that she would. He was then stooping over the bodies of his foes, to see how much injury he had done them.

"There is no vital harm," he remarked, after a moment's inspection. But he drew out his handkerchief and began bandaging one of the men's heads. Then he fetched his cloak to make them both a sort of bed under the hedge, where they could lie until relief was sent them. All this was done with a quiet spirit of humanity that had no ostentation in it; but for that reason was the more striking. Fleur de Lys was very pale, and watched all his movements with an expression which would have strangely cleared his brow and made his heart leap could he have seen it. But he saw nothing. Intent on his work, he loosened the men's collars bathed their foreheads with water from the ditch; and it was only when he had done everything that could be of any use that he rose, with an apology

for having detained her so long, and offered her his arm.

She was going to take it; but, looking into his face before doing so, she held out her hand and said simply, "You have a noble heart."

It was too dark to see whether Friedrich Leoneisen turned pale, or coloured, but he sank on one knee and pressed Mdle. de Bressac's hand to his lips. When he rose his eyes were glistening, and there was a modest yet proud smile on his features, which spoke more gratefully than the deepest tribute of spoken thanks.

"Yes," continued Fleur de Lys, in frank, firm accents, "why should I scruple to say what I feel? There is war between our countries, and for long years we must be enemies. But when you return home, Monsieur, it may be gladness to you to reflect that you at least have not left only ruins and tears behind you."

His voice was sad as he replied: "Enemies, Mademoiselle—must we always be enemies? Will there not be a time when the events of this unhappy year will be forgotten?"

They were then passing near a cottage which had been destroyed by shells. Its roof was gone, large holes were in its walls; the place where the garden had stood was a heap of charred bricks. Mdlle. de Bressac silently pointed to this. The Prussian sighed.

"I have been told that sixty-five years ago the village near my own home was like that," he said, and at these words he felt Mdlle. de Bressac start. "My mother has often related to me how, being a child, she was carried out at night from a burning house, where her father and mother had both been killed. This was during the Jena campaign. After that battle my father's father, with a few other Prussian noblemen, organised a secret league which was to stir up the peasants to resistance, and save our country from being dismembered. The league was betrayed; my father was seized and tried by a French court-martial; and for the crime of being a patriot was condemned to death."

Fleur de Lys's arm trembled, and her breathing grew quicker.

"I should tell you, Mademoiselle, that there was

a Frenchman who tried to save my grandfather," continued the Prussian, in a quiet voice. "Our ancestral home was then filled with French officers, and one of them, who had sat on the court-martial and voted for an acquittal, went personally to the Emperor to obtain a pardon. It was refused, and Napoleon, to punish the officer for what he called his temerity, ordered that he should command the platoon who were to perform the execution. Upon this, the officer broke his sword and threw up his commission. He did more, for resignation being unlawful in time of war, he underwent military degradation, and served through the rest of the campaign as a private soldier. This officer was"—

"Your name, Monsieur?" cried Fleur de Lys, laying both hands on his arm.

"I prefer to give you that of our benefactor, Mademoiselle," answered the Prussian. "It was the Marquis de Bressac, your grandfather."

V.

Less than a fortnight after the above scene, a great change had come over the country round Bressac. Surprised and outnumbered by the clever move of a French general, who performed the one brilliant feat of arms (on his side) during the war, the German army occupying O—— had been compelled to retreat, to avoid being taken prisoners *en masse*. Great was the rejoicing at O—— for three or four days, when it was thought that the cruel tide of defeat was at last going to turn. But at the end of that time people knew that the Germans would not allow their first failure to go unretrieved, and O—— prepared for another battle. Who then so elated as the Duc de Bressac? The French general had informed him that the castle might offer a useful point of resistance in the coming operations, and had sent a thousand men to encamp in the park and erect barricades there by felling down trees and demolishing outhouses. There were few things of which the Duke was prouder than his

trees; but it was with a radiant countenance that he limped about amongst the soldiers, encouraging them as they were hewing down the biggest, and pointing out to them that they might greatly strengthen their barricades by taking all the pedestals of the statues that adorned his garden. The soldiers were amazed, and the general could not forbear expressing his admiration.

“If you only knew, Monsieur le Duc, what resistance I have had to encounter in demolishing some other country houses—houses, too, that would have fitted into a single courtyard of this noble place,” added he, glancing, not without regret, at the stately building.

“Our family have enjoyed the possession of this house four centuries, so that we can afford to lose it, *mon Général*,” answered the Duke with a smile; and the same afternoon, as he saw an officer of engineers hesitate before ordering the destruction of an exquisite pavilion that stood in the way of the defence works, he took a pickaxe out of a sapper’s hands and struck the first blow into it himself.

Fleur de Lys, meanwhile, followed the example

of her father. Wherever a woman's voice and presence could nerve the arm or raise the spirit of a French soldier, there was she, calm, beautiful, and with stirring words of hope on her lips. The soldiers, reviving the title that was given to Mademoiselle de Montpensier under the wars of the "Fronde," called her "La Grande Mademoiselle;" and such was the enthusiasm she excited, that the more superstitious amongst the soldiers—those who came from Languedoc or Brittany—would try and touch some portion of her dress with their amulets as she walked amongst them, under the belief that it would charm their lives. But the devotion towards her rose to fever-heat when she declared that she had no intention of leaving the castle when the fighting began, but that she would remain in it to the end, *whatever happened*. Even the prudent M. Jean-Baptiste grew valiant then. To be sure, he reflected that, even if it came to the worst, there would always be the cellar to hide in; and, strengthened by this thought, he gave the reins to his imagination in recounting all that he would do when at length he should have those "gueux de Prussiens" opposite him. "Figure

to yourself, Monsieur le Marquis," he cried, with the most feeling gestures, to M. de Criquetot—"figure to yourself that one of those unhung thieves wanted to give me a hundred-franc note when he went away. It was that hobbedoy of a Count Leoneizen. You know that lout who used to go mooning about the garden. Said I to him, 'If I were a few years younger, I would teach you what it is to offer money to a Frenchman, you blue whipping-post, you. Hurry out of my sight!' and I threw the note into his face."

"Taking care to pick it up again as it fell, to put it into your pocket," continued the Marquis, with a laugh; which speech naturally a little disconcerted M. Jean-Baptiste, whose true reply to the Count had been, "Monsieur le Comte, it is only in Prussia that so much generosity is allied to so much valour. I will keep this note for ever as a souvenir, and wish you not 'Adieu,' but 'Au revoir.'"

But if M. Jean-Baptiste found a sceptical hearer in the Marquis, his tales were listened to with credence enough elsewhere, and the story of how extremely quick the Prussians had vanished from the

castle at the news that O—— was going to be attacked, lent not a little impetus to the preparations for defence. The General, however, though he felt how valuable an auxiliary Fleur de Lys would be to him, tried to dissuade her from thus exposing her life: but his eloquence was wasted. "My place is here, General," she said, gravely, once and for all; and from that moment this soldier perceived it would be useless to recur to the matter.

It was only M. de Criquetot who was aware how much heroism it needed on his cousin's part to take this resolution. *He* knew, or, at all events, guessed, that Fleur de Lys's heart would no longer be wholly with the combatants around her, as it would have been some weeks before. She had told him cursorily and vaguely how she had been protected by a Prussian officer on that night when she had returned alone from the village; but though the details were few, his lover's instinct had supplied the rest; and putting this and that together, recalling many a stray symptom and incident the true significance of which had escaped him at the time of its occurrence, but the real meaning of which now

stood revealed, he had not long remained doubtful as to who his rival was. But of course he had not breathed a word of his suspicions to Fleur de Lys. This was a thing too sacred to be hinted at by a third person. Only the young Frenchman, recognising in the Prussian officer a man more great, generous, and worthy of Fleur de Lys than he felt himself to be, had vowed that if he could bring this man and his cousin together, he would do so.

And so time flew by until the day of battle.

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It dawned and closed as many other days of battle had done for France during that year. Ill-elad, ill-organised, ill-armed mobs of recruits pitted against science, generalship, and discipline, there could be but one result. By the end of four hours' fighting the French soldiers had been routed. The battle was hopelessly lost, and there was but one point where resistance still continued to be offered—the Castle of Bressac.

It had not been much attacked during the day, for it was rather beyond the range of the field where the heat of the day's combat had raged. But in the

afternoon, when the enemy were masters of all the positions which the French had occupied, and it was found that the Castle of Bressac still fired shells furiously from a battery of four guns established in the park, a parliamentarian was despatched to explain how bootless further resistance was, and to demand a surrender.

The answer was a refusal.

The Duke had said to the commanding officer, "Let us not yield, so long as there is a cartridge amongst us, Monsieur;" and as the officer almost looked upon the Duke as the true commander of the place, he had conveyed this reply to the enemy.

An hour later the battery in the park had been dismounted, a whole wing of the castle had been blown into fragments, and the foremost barricade in the park no longer existed.

Another half-hour, and the second barricade was abandoned.

Then the third had to be relinquished.

Then the fourth.

The soldiers continued to fire bravely and desperately. They could see nothing either before or

behind them. The park and grounds were steeped in a fog of smoke, amidst which resounded the groans of wounded men and the bang of shells exploding every moment.

At length the park became thoroughly untenable. The retreat sounded, and the last barricade was deserted.

"We can still defend the castle!" shouted the Duke, who, grimy with powder and blood-stained, had been firing from the barricades side by side with the soldiers.

"To the castle!" cried the commanding officer, obediently echoing, and waving his sword above his head. He was on foot. His horse had been shot under him.

In a very few minutes more the park was filled with Prussians. The artillery duel had now ceased. It could only be a question of defending the castle man to man and hand to hand. The defenders fired out of the windows; the invaders fired back, but also charged forward with bayonets, to try and carry the place by storm.

The carnage was becoming frightful. Eleven

assaults were repulsed one after the other. The marble terrace, bordering on the ground-floor windows, was strewn with great mounds of dead, and blood trickled down the white steps, as if from an open fountain. Every moment a crash could be heard, as a bullet shivered a wainscot or smashed a mirror into a thousand atoms. There was not a pane of glass unbroken in the whole house. Two or three bullets, striking the great crystal chandelier in the state drawing-room together, cut the chains by which it hung, as though with a scythe, and the mighty fabric of glass splintered on to the floor like a shower of diamonds, carrying away crumbling masses of plaster from the ceiling with it. But nobody talked of yielding, until at length the cry arose that ammunition was beginning to fail.

"If we could only knock over that officer who is commanding them!" shouted a bare-armed, bare-throated soldier, who had thrown off his coat to fight better, and was streaming with perspiration, "it might discourage them."

M. de Criquetot and Fleur de Lys were near him. Fleur de Lys had been loading for the sol-

diers, her cousin taking care to stand—without her perceiving it—in such a position that a bullet must strike him before hitting her. The soldier had pointed out of the window in uttering his cry. M. de Criquetot and Fleur de Lys both glanced over his shoulder. The officer he was designating was Friedrich Leoneizen.

The man levelled his rifle. He was a deadly marksman; but just as he was drawing the trigger, the Marquis brushed by him with his elbow. The shot missed. Fleur de Lys, who had been holding her breath, and was leaning against a wall for support, looked towards her cousin, and their eyes met. The man was reloading a second time. He aimed; but M. de Criquetot was saved the trouble of spoiling the shot again, for, while the finger was on the trigger, the rifle slipped out of the man's hand, and he fell forward himself, with a bullet in the head.

The shout now seemed to rise from everybody at once:—"The officer!—fire at him!"

"He seems bewitched: the bullets won't touch him."

"This is at his head."

"Bang!"

"Bang!"

But the officer advanced, his men following him. Lead whistled around, above, on all sides, but never harmed him.

"If somebody does not bring him down, he and his men will be in the castle in another minute," thundered an officer, and he discharged three barrels of a revolver in quick succession.

At this moment, the Duke de Bressac, who had been kneeling behind the window-sill to fire the better, sprang up, with his hand to his head, staggered forward, and rolled at his daughter's feet. A revolver escaped from his hands, which Fleur de Lys picked up.

"The officer! at the officer!" the cry now started from a hundred parched throats at once.

Pale, but with her lips set, Fleur de Lys stepped forward. She hesitated a moment: then she aimed with her weapon. Friedrich Leoneizen was scarcely at thirty yards' distance from her. Her face was flushed, but grave and sad. She pressed the trigger.

He reeled in his saddle, looked, saw who had shot him; then fell.

Before her cousin could stop her, or guess her intention, Fleur de Lys had sprung on to the window-sill, where she knelt on one knee, her hair streaming, her breast daring the shower of lead. There was the remnant of a tricolour flag trailing over the ledge; she seized it and waved it, crying, "Vive la France! They are falling back!"

The Prussian bugles were sounding the retreat. The French girl heard them as she dropped, and she breathed her last amid the triumphant cheers of her countrymen, shouting "Victory!"

MADemoiselle VIVIANE.

MADEMOISELLE VIVIANE:

THE STORY OF A FRENCH MARRIAGE.

I.

THERE was a full gathering of relatives and intimate friends at the house of Monsieur le Président de Barre, Chief Judge of the Imperial Court of M——. The glass chandeliers were lighted, the housings had been removed from the furniture in the yellow drawing-room, and preparations had been afoot two days in the kitchen, in view of the supper. The occasion was indeed an important one. Mademoiselle Viviane de Barre, the Judge's only child and heiress, was to be formally introduced to her future husband, M. de Niel.

All the preliminaries of this solemnity had been conducted after the old and approved method. At ten years of age Mdlle. Viviane had been sent to a

convent; at seventeen she had been withdrawn thence. At seventeen and a half she was known in the best society of M—— as a young lady who would have five hundred thousand francs for her dower; who was religious, beautiful, and who sang well. At eighteen, twenty suitors had already solicited of her parents the honour of becoming her husband. At eighteen and a half the Judge and Madame de Barre, being of opinion that it was time some choice should be made, had called their friend and spiritual adviser, M. l'Abbé Béghin, into council, and between the three it had been settled that the most eligible suitor of all was M. Charles de Niel, who had not done his courtship in person, who had in fact never seen Mdle. Viviane; but who was the son of M. le Président de Niel, Chief Judge in the neighbouring town of A——, bore a name rendered honourable by a long line of judicial ancestors, possessed three hundred thousand francs of his own, was steady, laborious, and of pious education, held the office of Deputy Public Prosecutor in the town of T——, and would, no doubt, owing to his own merit and to his influential connections, but chiefly

the latter, rise in time to the highest post in the magistracy. It was Charles de Niel's own father who had proposed the match to President de Barre, and the match was thought a good one by all who were competent to pronounce an opinion on such a subject.

The only two interested persons who had not been consulted were those whom perhaps the negotiations most concerned; that is, M. Charles and Mdlle. Viviane themselves. When everything had been arranged, President de Niel had said to his son that it was fitting he should marry, and that on a certain day and at a stated hour he would present him to a young lady who, he was persuaded, would make him a good wife—to which Charles de Niel had answered, "Yes, sir," with the usual submissive respect of well-bred French sons towards their fathers, and without the smallest indication of a wish or a thought to choose his own wife for himself. On her side, Madame de Barre had said nothing whatever to her daughter, but on the evening of the proposed introduction she had superintended Mdlle. Viviane's dressing in person, had recom-

mended plainness—that is, simple muslin, with a tea-rose in the hair, and a pale-blue sash with long ends round the waist; and when she had satisfied herself that her daughter looked as gracefully modest as it becomes a legal dignitary's wife to be, she had accompanied her to the drawing-room with a mother's invariable conviction that Mdlle. Viviane knew nothing at all of what was going to happen. To those who have any knowledge of ladies, however, it is needless to remark that Mdlle. Viviane was as well acquainted with all the details of the impending comedy, knew the name of her suitor, and was as conversant with the history of his life, means, character, and prospects, as if the particulars had been supplied to her in a printed book, with an appendix of notes at the end. It might be interesting to speculate how it is that young ladies always become familiar with affairs intended to be kept a secret from them; but one had better confine one's self to making mention of the fact without seeking to fathom it.

The date was the month of July 1870, and as M—— was a large city, the number of people who

claimed to be the friends of a Chief Judge held in high esteem by all the authorities of the Empire, was considerable. By ten o'clock in the evening all the rooms of President de Barre's by no means small mansion were crowded. Madame de Barre had not taken any one into her confidence; but everybody guessed what was in the wind, for the mere circumstance of the President's wife giving a large party, with a dance and supper, at a season of the year when such entertainments are not usual (in France), was proof enough that something was preparing; and what more natural than that that something should be the betrothal of Mdlle. Viviane to the gentleman who had been fortunate enough to prevail over all the other suitors? So the friends, as they trooped up the wide staircase of the Judge's richly furnished house, evinced some curiosity to see who the lucky man would be. The rejected candidates were watchful to look how Mdlle. Viviane would bear herself under her prospective change of condition; and the feminine relatives of these rejected candidates—mothers, aunts, and pet sisters—persuaded that no good could come of having

ignored the qualities of their respective paragons, hoped sincerely that prosperity might attend the marriage, but were afraid not.

This was especially the sentiment among the most intimate friends of all. These were assembled in an inner drawing-room, where they petted Mdle. Viviane, smiled to her as she handed them tea, admired her albums of drawings, stroked her cat, and gave her recipes to cure a very bad cold with which her canary was afflicted. The blandishments were adroit and unceasing; but they were probably lavished in an inverse ratio to the real feelings of the donors, for, excepting an honest general and his wife, who, having no children of their own, were free to be indifferent as to what other people did with theirs, there was scarcely an intimate friend in the room but had reason to feel sore at Mdle. Viviane's rumoured engagement. Some were sore in their capacity of disappointed relatives; others simply as amateur matchmakers; but most felt sore in some way. There was Madame de Corbot, wife of the Public Prosecutor of M——, and an old school-friend of Madame de Barre, who had hoped

that Viviane would become her son's wife, and had gone through Heaven knows what amount of family diplomacy to attain this end; Madame Surpleix, sister to the Bishop, who had looked upon it as a thing preordained of Heaven that her own son was to be the favoured man; Madame de Diamantelle, wife of one of the departmental members, who had intrigued on behalf of a young cousin of hers whose welfare she had at heart; M. Poignfermaye, the Prefect, who had manoeuvred for himself, and several others whose disappointment now was none the less genuine from being concealed or gauzed over.

When a young lady, having half a million francs for her portion, as much more under form of "expectations," and a powerfully connected family, marries, she casts bitterness and perturbation into a large number of circles. All who had ventured to build castles in the air at her expense feel that they have a right to consider themselves in some way aggrieved, and, whether they have the right or no, they take it. The only real consolation which Mdlle. Viviane's intimate friends could find was, that perhaps her betrothed might turn out unworthy; that

this should be discovered before the contract was signed; and that, the match being broken off, the lists should be open anew to all comers. This, of course, they hoped, not for their own sakes, but for poor Viviane's, the dear child!

At ten o'clock the lucky suitor, of whom so many minds were sketching fancy portraits charitably coloured, had not yet arrived; but there was nothing to wonder at in this, for the town of A—— was distant some two hours by rail from M——, and President de Niel had written to say that he could only leave with his son after the rising of his court in the evening. He purposed doing no more than introduce the young man and then return; but M. Charles de Niel had obtained a week's leave from the Public Prosecutor of T——, whose deputy he was, and would stay a week, seeing Mdlle. de Barre once every day during that time, and proposing to her in form on the seventh day. All this had been arranged beforehand, and Madame de Barre could therefore wait without impatience. She busied herself about her guests, set the dances going in the large rooms, and organised whist-tables in the smaller

apartments for such as loved that game. Towards half-past ten, however, when the second quadrille was on, and when the whist had rather thinned the inner sanctum where the intimates had congregated, the major-domo glided softly to the door and announced "Monsieur le Président de Niel, Monsieur Charles de Niel."

There was an immediate hush, for though Madame de Barre had kept her counsel wonderfully well for a lady, it darted by instinct through everybody's mind that this must be the chosen man. The father and son entered, looking like duplicate copies of the same picture, etched, the one in grey, the other in black. They were both irreproachably dressed, and the Judge wore round his neck the scarlet collar of the Legion of Honour Commandership. He walked up to Madame de Barre, raised her hand to his lips with the grave courtesy of old times, and, in words slightly ceremonious but agreeable to hear, because evidently natural to the speaker, begged leave to introduce his son. Then he stood, and seemed to be seeking for Mdle. Viviane, who was at another end of the room, patiently inserting

slides into a stereoscope for an old lady who pretended to see and admire, but could do no such thing. A glance from her mother brought Viviane to where the gentlemen were standing. Her manner was collected, equally free from forwardness and timidity. The Judge paid her a paternal, courtly, and very sincere compliment on her beauty, then added, smiling: "Your parents and I, Mademoiselle, have been fast friends for many years. It would gladden me if our friendship could become hereditary; this is my son Charles de Niel;" and he rather solemnly ushered Charles forward.

She bent her head in response to the young man's deep bow, but said nothing; it was, in fact, not necessary that she should speak yet. The Judge turned to shake hands with President de Barre, who was grey like himself, be-collared like himself, and encased in that same smileless dignity which French judges study to wear until it fits them like a second nature. The two, after a few words of greeting incidental to the presentation of M. Charles to the Judge, soon strolled away with their hands behind their backs, and in amicable converse; and Charles

de Niel was left standing alone by the two ladies. During a quarter of a minute—but one of those quarters of a minute that constitute an age for the intensity of the emotions they comprise, and for the ulterior consequences they store up—he could not take his eyes off Viviane, though he tried.

She was, in all truth, a splendid creature, of a beauty lustrous and warm as the sunny climate of Provence, where she was born, and with eyes so teeming with expression that they seemed to shed light like precious stones. Her complexion was not white, but of that creamy shade called *bistre*, which passion can deepen to a ruddy glow; and the colour of her lips was a rich moist crimson, which, had she been an actress, would have made her despise the most scarlet rouge as too pink. The folds and waves of her hair clustered so abundantly that when let down they must have fallen to below her waist—silky, raven hair it was, and full of life and suppleness like all else about her. Judging merely by her age, it might have been said that she was too maturely developed, for she looked rather like a young woman than a girl; but all her movements were

young, virgin-like, strong, and fascinating. No wonder that a man should find it difficult to take his eyes off her, and feel his heart throb at the thought that she was to be his; for hers was the grace and beauty of innate queenship, and Charles de Niel in particular was one of those men on whom such beauty produces the most sudden and subjugating effects. Tall, thin, and pale, with the pallor of overwork, he had not the face or expression of genius, but looked simply a studious, scholarly young man, who has entered his profession with the hope of rising in it, and sets his ambition for the present on discharging his duties conscientiously. His hair was short, lank, and parted at the side; he was shaved, all but a little sparse whisker laboriously cultivated; he carried himself confidently, though with a little stiffness; and there was an air of rather starched dignity on his features, which came from his trying to give himself a look of magisterial gravity not quite suited to his years. When he took his eyes off Viviane, however, there was no longer the same expression on his countenance which had been there before. It was the difference between the block of

marble when it leaves the statuary's hands, with lineaments hardly sketched, and the same block when it has received the artist's final touch. Charles de Niel, in a few instants, had had life breathed into him.

After the commonplaces which are inevitable on such occasions, and which served to convince excellent Madame de Barre (who resembled her daughter but distantly, as a withered rose resembles a live one) that her future son-in-law was all that M. l'Abbé Béghin, his old tutor, had described, Charles de Niel asked Viviane if she danced. Her mother motioned to her to say yes, but even before she could have caught the sign, she had given that answer of her own accord; and then Charles first heard her voice—a voice singularly musical, yet not shy—it was indeed a little firm, he could not help thinking. It is not quite consonant with etiquette for a Public Prosecutor's deputy to dance, but this was a sort of private party; and then the sweet, dreamy *Valse de Roses*, which was being played, had acted as a stimulant on him, so that for the first time in his life he would have defied any etiquette on the globe's surface as he led out Viviane among the throng of

guests who parted to make a way for them. He encircled her with his arm, and the perfume of her hair, the touch of her hand, the balmy breath of her lips, which came and went faster with the rapidity of the whirl, completed the intoxication which the mere sight of her had begun. When the music ceased, he fancied he had not been waltzing more than a couple of seconds, and cast an impatient glance at the musicians' corner, as if these men were not toiling enough for their money. However, this being a dance and not a ball, it happened very fortunately for him that at the moment when the musicians stopped supper was announced. He had then the right to escort Viviane into the supper-room if she pleased. She did not refuse; on the contrary, it filled him with delight to see that she accepted his escort willingly, and that she even seemed desirous of drawing him into conversation.

The rejected suitors, intimate friends, and others who had fixed glances of more or less benevolence on the young couple whilst they were dancing, did not lose sight of them amid the knife-and-fork fray of supper, and more than one pair of eyes, after

guiding their owners to where the creature comforts were set out, resumed their functions of vigilance, loth to surrender the sweet hope that Mdlle. Viviane's accepted lover might prove less satisfactory to herself and her parents in the end than had been originally contemplated. But the young magistrate, who was unaware that anybody had an interest in surveying, much less in criticising, his movements, conducted Viviane to a part of the room where he thought she would be most comfortable, and began catering for her with an assiduity which surprised himself from its energy and readiness. The supper was laid out on the sensible plan of little tables for parties of two, four, or six. He monopolised one of the smallest, and brought to it all he could find that was good, not excepting a bottle of champagne, which he set on the table in its silvered pail of ice, and from which he filled Viviane's glass and his own, wondering of what all this junketing could remind him—though, poor fellow! it reminded him of nothing, for being a bookworm by habit and vocation, he had never taken part in anything like it before. It is certain that, if some of the thieves, in-

briates, and others against whom the Deputy Prosecutor had been inveighing in court with all a neophyte's austerity but a few hours before, had beheld him sitting there with such keen enjoyment of the new happiness that had invaded his life, they would have marvelled at his brazenness in telling them that unremitting labour was the sole secret of contentment. His contentment, indeed, beamed from all his features, and lent them the animation which is the livery of happiness. He smiled, forgot that he was a censor of the sins of men, discarded the measured tones to which he had schooled his voice, and when he had helped Viviane to some of the dainties he had collected, dipped his lips in wine, and summoned up all the resources of his fresh-stirred spirits, his new-born hopes, and his wit—for most men are witty in such moments—to dazzle and please the girl.

But just as he was looking up to make some glad, merry remark about the gaiety of the scene around them—for the music in the next room had begun again, and the ebb and flow of bright dresses, the jingling of plate, and the popping of corks

seemed all to be going on to tune—an unlooked-for thing occurred for him: he caught her eyes fastened on him with a deep expression of curious scrutiny. It was a very odd glance. Somehow he had had a vague feeling that she had looked at him in this way more than once before—whilst they were dancing, whilst he was running about to set the things on their table, and again whilst he was talking; but he had dismissed the idea, thinking it must be an illusion. Now, however, there was no illusion. Though she lowered her glance at once on being detected, he had not missed the singular expression of it—a blending of irresolution, pity, and something like menace—one of those glances which he himself occasionally rested on a prisoner when doubtful whether he had some redeeming point which might plead in his favour, or whether he might be sacrificed without remorse. This was the kind of glance, and it nipped the remark he was going to make short on his lips. There was a moment's silence, during which he reflected that she had only answered him as yet in monosyllables, and that, although she had seemed eager enough for his

company, her few smiles to him had all been forced. Then, being at a loss to understand why this should be, he recurred to his first belief that he must be mistaken—that it was the gas or something that had deceived him. He looked up again, saw that she was smiling a graceful friendly smile to a girl acquaintance at a neighbouring table, and, confirmed by this in his mistrust of his own eyesight, he said, lightly, "What tricks our fancy can play us! Do you know, I was thinking a moment ago that you looked at me like a judge," and he laughed.

"Like a judge!" she echoed; and again the gas, or whatever it was, must have played him false, for he thought she darted at him a glance rapid and piercing as steel.

"You are not eating," he remarked, observing this with some concern.

"Thank you," she answered. "I am not quite used to late suppers; but I will take an ice."

He gave her an ice, and she ate or pretended to eat, though it looked as if her doing so were mainly to oblige him. Soon she said, in her soft,

clear, and grave voice: "You were saying, 'like a judge.' Have judges, then, a look different to other people's?" and she laughed, too, but a constrained laugh.

"On occasions," he replied, glad to be questioned by her.

"What occasions, for instance?" she inquired, toying with her spoon.

"I mean there are times when a judge feels doubt as to the extent of an accused man's guilt. He tries then to probe deeper than the man's countenance, into his heart."

"And what is a judge's notion of a guiltless heart?" she asked, with fixed attention.

Men generally like to be interrogated on professional matters. If Charles de Niel had been a paradoxist, he would have answered that people are all bad alike; that the only difference is, that some are brought to book for their sins, whilst others remain unsuspected; and that, by striking an accused man with all one's might, without pausing to weigh the blow, one may be sure of having punished a culprit, whether the man be guilty of the par-

ticular offence ascribed to him or not. But the young Deputy Prosecutor was not addicted to social theories, and he replied with the seriousness of one whose maxims as to guilt are quite plain and traditional: "Men who have led an honest and laborious life for a certain number of years may be drawn into crime by the pressure of want, anger, or ignorance; and I would deal leniently with these if they show themselves ashamed of their guilt, that is, do not set up an excuse for their offences. The worst kind of culprits are those who try to throw the responsibility of their crimes on society. I have had to do with prisoners of this sort, and I have always been merciless to them, notwithstanding that some were men who had performed courageous and disinterested actions at times, and were capable of doing so again."

"And yet," remarked she, with something like a flash in her eyes, "a courageous or disinterested act must come from a heart intrinsically nobler than that of a man who has never done anything but live ploddingly in selfishness."

"No," said he, speaking this time with the pre-

cision of a man who is arguing a point with one of his own cloth; "you may trace an act of courage or generosity to vanity, which is only abstract selfishness, or to a passing impulse bred of animal pity, love, or excitement: you cannot trace years of plodding, that is, honest, hard-working life, to anything but a clear, sound mind. And a clear mind argues a well-ordered heart. If a man have so conquered his passions as to become a machine working regularly, uncomplainingly, patiently, from a sense of duty, I take it he is a more worthy character, even though he has yielded to temptation once, than the brilliant law-breaker who would often find it difficult to explain why he did this or that good deed, but has a whole fagot of theories ready cut and dried to explain how he became a criminal."

"Then dead-level is your ideal?" she asked, in a voice which was searching rather than contemptuous.

"Yes," he answered very decidedly. He had not touched any of the delicacies with which he had piled the table, but was tracing triangles on

his plate with his knife's point. He seemed absorbed. "Ah, Mademoiselle," he added, with a short sigh, "there is more warmth in some of those dead-level characters than you appear to think: a plain is not flowerless from being flat, nor a pool shallow because its surface is unruffled. Let me give you a case with which I had to deal professionally not two months ago. There was a workman at T—— who led a plodding life in every sense of that term. He worked hard from morning to night, and was not much liked by other workmen, for he was never seen to spend a sou on anybody but himself, and would never join his companions in any of their drinking-bouts. They said, too, that he was sulky. Well, his object was to save money enough to marry a factory-girl. One day he learned that a brother workman of his, who was much handsomer, more intelligent, gayer, and more open-handed than himself, was courting this same girl. She had plighted her troth to him, the plodding workman, and his rival knew it, but it was part of his gaiety to think that if he could win the girl away from his comrade it would be fair sport. The plodder waited for him

one night at a street corner and split his head open with a wood-cleaver. I am not defending the man, for I delivered the speech which sent him to the scaffold; but I could not help thinking, on reading of his execution, that perhaps the real culprit was the man who had been murdered, or (his voice deepened a little)—the girl.”

Viviane turned very pale. She cast another rapid and hesitating glance at Charles de Niel over her fan which she was fluttering; and for a moment a battle appeared to rage within her. Then she rose and said quickly: “Monsieur de Niel, I must speak to you at once in private. The library beyond the conservatory there is empty. We shall be alone in it.”

He rose too, feeling a surprise which it would be useless trying to depict. He gave her his arm, and worked her a passage through the supper throng. One must have heard a well-bred Frenchman's estimate of what is becoming in a young girl, to understand the stupefaction, amounting to dismay, of the young official, as he followed Viviane, rather than led her, through the ball-room and con-

servatory. Her curious interrogatories at supper he had not so much noticed; but now, taking these in connection with the strange glances she had cast him, and with her entirely unexpected request, it quite staggered his at no time very imaginative mind. They were not long reaching the library, and when there, she came at once to what she had to say, not losing a moment. Standing on the hearthrug and fronting him, with her face flushed, her bosom heaving, and her eyes fixed on his with emotion and excitement, "Monsieur de Niel," she began, "I believe you have come with the intention of offering me your hand."

"Yes," he stammered, feeling his heart shrink, as if from fear of a blow.

"Well, let me tell you frankly,"—she made a gesture of entreaty with her hand at seeing his features blanch,—“let me tell you that I can never be your wife. Oh, I will explain everything to you without reserve,” added she, speaking quicker, but sinking into a chair. “I will speak to you as if you were my confessor. I can trust in your honour, I feel; but even if my secret were disclosed, it could

have no effect on my determination." She paused an instant. "This is what I have to say: I was brought up at a convent; every word I heard there was meant to teach me that honesty should be the rule of life. I was told to worship truth, to respect people, not according to their wealth but their goodness, to believe that there are eternal punishments in store for those who act or utter lies. When I was home for the holidays they took me to church; I went to confession; my mother, who is pious in the estimation of the world, gave me the lives of the saints to read, impressed upon me that I must take pattern by them, and that there is no happiness possible without religion. All this lasted so long as I was a child, and I may say that the nun who chiefly taught me at the convent was a model herself of all the virtues she enjoined. Heaven must be peopled with such women if there is a heaven; God knows how much I loved and admired her, and how I vowed to take her for an example when I should go out into the world! I was seventeen when I left the convent. To tell you of my illusions, of my belief in the goodness of all the persons with

whom I was brought into contact, is more than I dare do, for I pity myself when I think of it. I will only say that the trust I put in my parents was something beyond the strength of sentiments one can define. It was holy, intense, a thing of every day and hour. I was convinced that no thought that was not pure, beautiful, and good could cross my mother's mind; my father was in my eyes the noblest and most virtuous of men. Do you know, M. de Niel, I have sometimes asked myself which is the acutest of all known griefs, and I think it is that of finding one's confidence shaken in those we have loved—as I loved my father and mother?”

She smiled with painful bitterness as she said this, and glanced up at him to watch the effect of her words on Charles de Niel. He was leaning against the mantelshelf, and gazing at her with almost haggard apprehension.

“It is not necessary to go through the story of how my illusions were reft from me one by one,” resumed she, speaking with moody vehemence: “I entered the world as if I had been a young girl in a silk gown going through a bramble-bush. All my

faith in the goodness, truth, and disinterestedness of people was rudely torn from me in shreds. My father I found to have but one idol—respectability; and respectability with him meant money. His judicial office, the highest and saintliest which a man can exercise, he looked upon as a means of procuring him the decoration of the Legion of Honour. He was continually anxious as to whether such and such a judgment of his would satisfy the Ministry, and I have seen him in the deepest consternation because he had to adjudicate between two merchants of M——, both equally rich and influential: he feared that whichever way he decided, he should have one of these merchants for his enemy. As to my mother—well, my mother was chiefly concerned about getting me married; and in her solicitude for what is termed a ‘suitable’ match, she conned over all the names of the single men in the province, but without ever, so far as I could see, weighing any other qualities in them than their money, birth, and connections. I was nearly allotted to a man who had made millions by a swindling joint-stock company; and if this suitor was rejected,

it was not because of his swindle, but because it was doubtful whether there was not an article in the Code by which the swindled people might prosecute the man and get their money back. Another of my wooers was considered a rising man. He had altered his political convictions several times, and had climbed a step higher in the world by each of his apostasies. I was saved the honour of becoming his intended bride by the mere circumstance of his lighting upon a lady who had a couple of hundred thousand francs more dowry than I, and hence was naturally preferable. Then came yourself, M. de Niel" (here her voice, from common politeness, lost some of its asperity), "and I will not disguise from you that your being a man of honour had very little to do with our being introduced to each other this evening. Our marriage was mapped out beforehand in all its minute details. You were to bring so much, I so much. Your birth was irreproachable, because your fathers had been judges before you, and this was thought an element worth considering; but it was deemed a pity you should only be able to show 300,000 francs as your part of the wedding-

contract, and an appeal was to be made to your parents to add another 200,000 francs, if possible. If I died within two years of our marriage, your integrity was held in so high esteem that you were to be compelled by deed to restore my half-million to our family; just as if you would not have done so without the deed! You were also to be tied down—I believe they call it tying down—about certain contingencies, such as the impulse to dispose of my capital without letting me know, or the wish to alienate too much of your own. In fact, anybody reading the contract which was to be the charter of our wedded life might have thought that you were a notoriously dishonest person, against whose enterprises it was considered urgent to shield me; and this flattering estimate of your character seemed also to have been extended to your mental capacities, for instead of computing what way you might be able to make in your profession by your own unaided talents, it was repeatedly dwelt upon that by the influence of your relatives you might be able to outstrip some of your colleagues less luckily connected. Even your political opinions were made

the subject of speculation; for it was decided that you were to cultivate as many political acquaintances as feasible in the department, in order that when the Government had been coaxed into promoting you faster than your merit warranted, you might compel them to go on promoting you faster still, by the threat that if you did not obtain all you asked for, you would get yourself elected to the Chamber as an independent representative. So you see nothing was omitted in calculating the items that were to make our marriage dignified, and promote in me a feeling of esteem and admiration for you."

Her voice had grown quick and sarcastic again in pronouncing the last sentences. Charles de Niel, who had flushed red at the unpitiful frankness of her words, tried once or twice to speak, and at last said, coughing to suppress his hoarseness: "You attribute to these marriage-contracts a meaning they do not possess. I should not have regarded it as a slight upon myself if your fortune had been protected. Marriage is a union of interests as well as of affections, you know, and"—

"Marriage should be a union of sympathies,—it

should be love," she interrupted, her whole frame vibrating, and her hands tearing abruptly at her handkerchief. "The woman should give herself and her fortunes to her husband wholly; she should go with him to his house to be his helpmate, his partner, his slave. There should be no contract to bind their actions but his will, and her love freely, unreservedly, and trustingly bestowed. That is how I understand marriage; and any other union save on these conditions is a bargain as mercenary and immoral as those at which society veils its eyes, because the Church has not sanctioned them. Monsieur de Niel, long before it had been decided, without my approval, that I should be your wife, I had resolved that I should be the wife of but one man,—the man whom I could love and worship, poor or rich, in happiness or in sorrow, and who could love me without knowing who I was or what I possessed. And that man I have found!"

The pallor of Charles de Niel's face deepened slightly as he gazed at her there before him, so beautiful in the splendid vigour of her love. He sighed inaudibly, and then said slowly, as if in

physical pain: "I know that I am not an ideal hero. At first sight of you I felt how much I should have to do to deserve my happiness."

She seemed a little touched by this simple rejoinder, and it was with some softness that she replied: "I do not say that I could not have liked you, M. de Niel, had we met under different circumstances to those of to-night; but it was fated otherwise. My choice has been made for more than a year past. The man I love is not rich. You might say that he is not my equal in social rank; but I will marry him, and no one else, if not with my parents' consent, then without it. In two years and a half I shall be of age, and he will wait for me that time. He says he would wait for me for twenty years; and I believe him, for there is truth in all his looks and words. Then my life belongs to him of right, for I may say that he saved it. "Yes," added she, and her voice grew extraordinarily sweet and pensive in speaking of her lover, "I told you I would confess myself in full, and I acknowledge that on discovering that my parents regarded me as a bale of merchandise to be sold to the highest bidder,

I felt so great a loathing for life that I wished to leave it. Death seemed a merciful relief beside the prospect of being all my days chained to a man I could not love; and if I had not met this man—this man who will be my husband—I should have been dead now.” She rose and gravely approached Charles de Niel, this time a blush mantling on her face. “It remains for me now,” she murmured, “to give you the end of my confession. I had not intended at first to breathe a word of my secret to anybody. I had thought of letting you pay your addresses to me in the usual way, and I should have made you believe that I purposed marrying you; then, as soon as I was of age—for I should have induced you by one excuse after another to postpone our marriage till that time—I should have told the truth. Your conversation and your manner this evening disarmed me, or, rather”—she hesitated a moment, and suddenly her feverish animation of voice and gesture returned to her—“No, let me be entirely frank. What changed my resolution was not regard for yourself, M. de Niel. It was this: a superstitious terror seized me, that if I trifled with you, if I let

you fall in love with me and then broke your life, it would bring me misfortune. I have seen this happen; for there is a curse on deceit in all its forms. Whilst you were speaking, I fancied I saw that you would challenge the man I had preferred to you, and kill him; or, worse than that, I had a presentiment that from the moment I began to encourage in you a love which I had no intention of requiting, I myself should cease to be loved by the man whose love is life to me. Now I have told you all."

She seemed to expect an answer from him, but her eyes were not downcast, and there was nothing in her manner to show that she deemed her confession a thing to be ashamed of. Charles de Niel could only look at her in seeming fascination. Perhaps he would have liked to speak, but he appeared to be following a train of thought which left him only power to feel the intense humiliation of his position without finding a word to alleviate it. She waited a moment, mechanically opening and shutting the white fan in her hands; then she said slowly: "I have not asked you to keep my secret with

regard to my parents or yours; I should not be justified in doing so. But I must tell you candidly what I have resolved. The day my father and mother learn what you now know, I shall leave their house. My love is not one for which I have any reason to blush, but I would not submit to the two years and a half of reproaches, persecutions, and petty miseries which it is in the power of parents to inflict on their children. My parents wished to sell me as completely as any slave was ever sold; I have rebelled. If I am to be persecuted for doing that which I have a right to do, like the poorest of God's creatures—that is, bestow my affection where I please—I shall fly for protection to the man who will shield me. I shall not be his wife in the eyes of your law, but I shall in the sight of Heaven."

Charles de Niel winced, and made a gesture of dissuasion. The sanctity of parental authority and the horror of all family scandals are sentiments so deeply rooted in the minds of Frenchmen of ancient houses that the young Procureur for a moment forgot his own sorrow to think only of what a frightful disgrace it would be if Mdle. Viviane de Barre

eloped from her father's roof. "This must not be thought of, Mademoiselle," he said, quickly. "If your affections are irrevocably bestowed, and if"—(the words seemed to cost him an effort)—"if the object of them be as worthy as I make no doubt he is, your parents can certainly be prevailed upon to give their consent to your marriage. You would never forgive yourself if you brought down dishonour upon the great name your ancestors have left you."

"My affianced husband is a man of honour, spotless as snow," she answered unquaveringly; "but you little know my parents if you fancy they could ever be softened or argued into giving their consent to what they would call a *mésalliance*. Oh, if my love were ever so mean of soul and weak of intellect, but rich only and of good connections, then it would be no *mésalliance*; but he is poor, a man of genius, who works for his bread with his hands and his brains, and will owe the fame he will one day earn to no one but himself. This is a *mésalliance*, a thing banned by all our family traditions and the customs of society, and sooner than sanction it I believe my parents would see me in my coffin."

"You must not say that," he interposed with a moan.

"It is true," she rejoined simply, and playing again with her fan; "but you must not suppose I am insensible to the dishonour of a scandal. If I saw a way of avoiding it without submitting to what I consider to be even more debasing than the worst of scandals, then I should not speak as I have done; but I can imagine no way unless my secret be kept from my parents till I come of age. Then, as they would be powerless to prevent my marriage, perhaps they will pretend to sanction it, sooner than have it said that I defied them. To bring all this about, however," added she, resignedly, "it would need that we both—I mean you and I—should seem to agree to the match which our families have planned for us; and this is more than I have a right to ask of you, or than you could consent to grant even if I did ask it."

Their conversation had lasted about twenty minutes, and had been uninterrupted by the intrusion of any strangers into the library. The sounds of the music from the distant ball-room reached

them by snatches and muffled. They were quite alone, and they seemed more solitary still, and the quietness of the room where they were seemed deeper and more solemn than before, as Charles de Niel replied, after a moment's oppressive silence: "I will not tell you what my grief has been this evening, Mademoiselle, for I think I do not yet foresee myself how ineffaceable a mark this last half-hour's events will leave upon my life. But I will serve you with what devotion lies within my strength; and, since I can claim no other title, let me at least be your friend. I will consent to whatever plan you may suggest to preserve your secret. Let our families suppose, if you wish it, that we are agreed, and shall by and by be married to each other. It will be the first deceit I shall have wilfully practised on people I love and respect; but the end in view is a good one, since it involves your welfare, and this will justify me. All I ask of you is this: There will inevitably come a time when your generous nature will cancel the judgment you have formed respecting your parents, and when the concealment of any of your thoughts from them will seem irksome to

you. At such a moment you may need a friend who can plead your cause with them, not better, but more dispassionately, than yourself. Call me then, and let me be your advocate and—my rival's. It is my profession to plead" (he smiled faintly), "and I do not pass for eloquent; but I feel I shall be eloquent in pleading any cause which has for its stake your happiness."

He caught up his hat, which he had laid upon the chimney-piece, bowed, and left her. A minute afterwards she was still standing motionless, looking at the door through which he had disappeared. There were tears in her eyes.

"I am glad I told him the truth," she murmured; "but if I had not, he would have been a generous enemy."

II.

Charles de Niel left President de Barre's house so overcome that some of the rejected suitors who met him on the staircase were fain to hope that something was amiss. And something was amiss.

It is part of that universal creed which is making its way more and more in this pleasant age of ours that no man is, on the whole, much better than another; and yet it may be doubted whether, taken all in all, Charles de Niel was not as fair a specimen of the "perfect" man as any to be found. He was dull, but so are most perfect men. He had no startling flashes of thought, no ethereal impulses towards an unseizable something, no vague desire to devote himself to a scheme for improving the human race; but he was good in his mechanical geniusless way, and wholly good. The impulse that came naturally uppermost to his mind in all the circumstances of life was an honest one. He slaved at his profession, never asking himself whether he liked it or disliked it, but viewing it as a thing to be followed and adhered to, because he had been bred to it, from no choice of his own. He gave himself a great deal of trouble to guess whether the prisoners whom he was called upon to prosecute were guilty or not. If guilty, he set himself to get them sentenced to the severest penalties which the law inflicted, because, in doing so, he fancied he

was discharging his duty towards society, and society was the highest embodiment of worshipfulness which his intellect could grasp. He was twenty-seven, and had led a quite joyless, sorrowless, uneventful life. His father was stern, honourable, and cold; his mother was cold, and he was cold by inheritance. When they had told him he must marry, he had expected nothing more of this ordeal than a cold wife, who should govern his house with honourable blamelessness; bear him, if Heaven pleased, two cold children, who should look upon him and her as patterns of the virtues and the proprieties, and add so much in money and family influence to his social status. He had read books in which great passions were described, but he thought them stupid reading. He had also been troubled with a friend who was deeply in love; and after lecturing this man, he had dropped him, feeling not quite sure whether it was honest to love in this way, neglect one's duties, and be impervious to argument. Charles de Niel would have walked a mile to satisfy a moderate whim of his own; he would have gone two to oblige a reasonable friend;

he would not have walked three to please Heaven itself, unless the practical utility of the journey had been most irrefutably demonstrated to him.

And this was the man into whose life a ravaging, inextinguishable passion had fallen unawares like a firebrand.

He could not at first realise it. When he found himself in the street, he stopped for a minute under a gas-lamp and leaned against it, to try and collect his thoughts. He asked himself whether he had not been dreaming—whether he was sober? Certainly, if it had been prophesied to him that morning that he should, in the course of two hours, see a woman to whom he would, in the brief glance of an instant, give his whole heart and spirit; that this woman would confide to him that she could never be his wife because she loved a man of whom her parents disapproved; and that he, a public censor, and a private moralist to boot, would enter of his own free will into a conspiracy for keeping this woman's illicit attachment a secret from her parents, and for by and by inducing the parents to give their sanction to the attachment—certainly, if this had been

foretold him, he would have stared with incredulity at the prophet. The thing was, indeed, out of the range of possible provision. Was he not Charles de Niel, a man descended from the De Niels, who had been judges, and wealthy, and bowed down to in all time; and could he not have taken any girl he had ever seen before to wife, for the simple condescension of asking? Had he not, in fact, been systematically circumspect in his relations with the sex because of this very fact, that he felt himself to be a prize for which many were angling; and had he not repeatedly theorised within his own intellect as to the imprudence, the immorality even, of marriages that were not based solely on the adjustment of two equal names, two equal fortunes, and two equal collections of interests to one another? Oh yes, all this was the case, and yet there were the facts in opposition to them; and what made the situation more perplexing and wildly hopeless was that, notwithstanding her rejection of him, notwithstanding her horrible—for, to his notions, it had been simply horrible—confession of filial insubordination and outrageously misplaced affections,

notwithstanding that no shade of probability existed of her ever feeling anything for him but the most complete indifference, he loved Viviane with a force and a fervour that had spread into all his being like a poison.

He recalled every incident of their interview that evening. There are inflections of voice, gestures, glances which one cannot describe on paper or in words, but which recur to one like the bars of a striking air once heard. He remembered that Viviane had stood near the mantelshelf and gazed at him during a moment as if wondering whether she could trust him; then she had made a quick little wave of the hand, and her lips had relaxed, which meant that she thought she could. Her voice had much less of the Provençal accent than his, and her demeanour was calmer than that of most Southern women, but by moments the warm blood of her native province had asserted itself in petulant gestures, and in a few words spoken with the rapid quering intonation which the peasant-women of the country possessed. Her attitude had been alternately that of a wounded fawn, turning to ask with her

eyes why she was being pursued, and that of a young panthress untamed and defiant. What was the impression which he had definitely carried away from the interview—was it pity, wonder, admiration? This he knew not. The perfume she breathed still lingered with him, her muslin dress still seemed to touch his fingers as when he danced with her, he could see her eyes, lips, complexion, her wavy hair, her royal grace of figure before him as if he had not left her presence. And all these recollections were blended into the sensation which he knew to be love—a love that would never leave him, which must be the delight and torment of his existence, which would be intertwined with all his thoughts; and which, if not rewarded, must eventually drive him to the melancholy which brings death, or to that thirst for forgetfulness in which a man throws off his first nature as a garment and plunges into new modes of thinking, being, and acting, as into the sea.

He left his lamp-post and walked straight ahead of him through the streets. As the cafés did not close till one in M——, there were many of them

open on his way, and their bright lights, the jingling of glasses, and the rattling of dominoes on their marble tables, were almost a relief to him. There is always at least one thoroughfare in large provincial cities which is gayer than the gayest of Parisian Boulevards. The whole life of the place is centralised there—the officers of the garrison, the local quidnuncs, the prettiest of the factory-girls after their work, pass and repass it, and the thronging and animation of the scene are kept up until long past the time when sensible people are, or should be, in bed. Charles de Niel could not have slept that night, and he dreaded being quite alone with his own thoughts, for they were too new and full of recent pangs. He fancied he should like to walk about on that gay thoroughfare where he was till daybreak; in moments when he might be tempted to doubt again whether he had been dreaming all that evening, the noise around would prove to him that he was still awake and among the living. Lover-like, however, he had no sooner made up his mind on this point, than he struck across the road and dived down a narrow street, in search of solitude.

He had abruptly lit upon the question: Who could this mysterious lover of Viviane's be? She had said he was a man of genius who worked with his hands and brains, and would attain fame. This must mean an artist, painter, sculptor, or perhaps even a poet or journalist. He knew what a journalist was. He had had several of them sent to prison, he was glad to think—men who discussed highly and mightily things about which they knew nothing, egged on the public to chronic discontent, and called themselves the moulders of the nation's mind. Poets were not much better, but more conceited. As for artists, all the artists he had ever met, owed money, and were for reforming the social system. Perhaps there were reasonable artists and fair-minded journalists. It must be so, for she had called her lover a man of stainless honour and truthful mind; but he was so little acquainted with this circle of society, that he could think of nobody, working with his brains and hands, who could answer to Viviane's enthusiastic description, and be worthy of her. M—— was a seaport town. Diving down the narrow street, Charles de Niel had come

within sight of the sea, which was lit up to silvery blueness by a crescent moon. He made for the beach, and there, facing the waves and leaning against a fishing smack drawn up on the shingle, he tried to conjure up out of the waters, as they broke at his feet, the face of his rival. He softened and grew just as the minutes flew by over this lonely occupation, which was not without a certain sad fascination for him. By degrees he came to invest his rival with all the qualities which he instinctively felt that he himself lacked. His admiring recollection of Viviane must have had something to do with the humility with which, for the first time in his life, he endeavoured to take stock of his own deficiencies. He felt that Viviane could only have bestowed her love upon a man who, however low his present station, must have been intended by nature for a prince among men, and he ended with a sigh by picturing to himself this man as the incarnation of all physical and moral perfection—a very hero of romance.

He was roused from his reverie by hearing a gladsome voice carolling on the beach not far from

him. He must have been standing where he was a long time, for the noise in the city behind him had subsided, many lights had been put out, and there was no sound on the beach beside the sea, but this one voice which was drawing nearer to him. It was a young man's voice, and it trolled out its song with a gaiety quickened by wine and the brightness of the night:

“On entend au loin la chanson des merles :
O ménétrier, prends ton violon ;
Les gais rossignols égrenent des perles :
Quel beau soir ! Dansez, filles d'Avallon !”

From where he was he could see the singer approach. He wore a blouse like ordinary workmen, and a *béret*—the flat cap, either scarlet or blue, indigenous to Provence. When within a few yards of the smack he slackened his pace to twirl himself a cigarette, then stopped altogether to fumble for a match—not successfully as it seemed, for he swore one of those light oaths which are the small coin of French expletives. It was at this moment that he caught sight of Charles de Niel, who had stepped out of the shadow of the boat on purpose not to startle him as he passed. He did not seem

reassured by the sight, and looked even somewhat disconcerted; but he pushed his courage to the front, and shouted out a civil request for a light, maintaining, however, a prudent distance.

Charles de Niel, not being a smoker, answered that he had no matches. At the sound of his voice, the young man in the blouse made a few steps hastily forward, stared him in the face, then laughed, and held out both hands.

"This is an unexpected meeting, Charley (*Charlot*)! How do you do? and why are you here at this time of night, frightening the public?"

Charles de Niel did not give his hand. He stood astonished, and scrutinised his interlocutor.

"I do not remember you," he said.

"No doubt," replied the other, with a merriness that had a dash of acid in it. "Top branches often forget the lower ones. You have risen, whilst I have done just the other thing, which is enough to account for your shortness of memory; but never mind, the race is not over yet, and I may still distance you, so we may as well shake hands."

"I recollect you now," said the young Procureur, shaking his hand, not gushingly, but with some interest. "You are Marjolain, Sixte Marjolain, my old school-fellow."

"And you never missed the chance of prophesying how very badly I should end, which was kind of you! Sixte means, by the way, that I am sixth of a family who have unanimously (since I saw you last) resolved never to give me another stiver, alleging that I am a good-for-nought, who spent all my own share of the family money—money in our family being apparently not made for spending. Praise be to *νεφεληγερέτα Ζεύς*, patron of cloud-blowers, here is half a lucifer-match in my pocket, and luckily the good half! May I offer you a cigarette?—No? You always kept from bad habits, and I hope you have found life more pleasant from it. I should not have done so. All I complain of is, that there are not bad habits enough. I would willingly acquire a few more: they are the best things in life. But, as I was saying, Heaven ordained you for a prophet. You foretold that I should spend every sou I had, which I did scrupulously; you fore-

saw, further, that I should have to work for my bread, which I am also doing, as you see."

"You seem to be the same unconcerned fellow as you used to be when we were at school, and later when we were students together," answered Charles de Niel, not unkindly but seriously. "I hope the world has not dealt as hardly by you as it generally does with those who begin as you did."

"Well, as to that," replied Marjolain, blowing three superb puffs of smoke from his nostrils seaward, "as to that, my father was a hosier, who thought to make a barrister of me, and I have become an engraver instead. The moral is that inordinate ambition never prospers. It is I who engrave those pictures you see in the illustrated papers, also prints for hanging on the walls. I earn more than I absolutely require, and I spend all I earn: miserly habits being the root of all evil. Of a Sunday I might wear a black coat if I pleased; but I prefer a blouse: comfort being the first law of religion. Perhaps you pity me for ranking as a mechanic; you are wrong. As a hosier's son, I cut no very grand figure among the set which you

adorn; as an educated engraver among unlearned engravers I am somebody. We have a political club, of which your police know nothing, as usual. I speak there, and am listened to. I always speak clap-trap; but that makes no difference. Clap-trap is what a two-handed sword and biceps enough to ply it were in the Middle Ages: you make your way with it. You are an example of what legal clap-trap can do; I shall climb the pole by means of socialistico-communistical clap-trap. When you are Public Prosecutor-General I may be a representative of the people or a Minister; perhaps I shall reach my goal before you; if so, I will invite you to dinner."

"I might have foreseen that too, Sixte," remarked the young Procureur, but this time very severely, for a revolutionary radical stood little higher in his esteem than a malefactor. "You first fritter away substance, then, finding labour tiresome, wish to rise by disturbing society. There are many like you."

"Yes, there are," nodded Marjolain, quite coolly;

“and look you, Charley, the best of rising by disturbing society, as you call it, is, that it costs no trouble and offers all the excitement of gambling into the bargain. I could never have believed that the people were such a concrete mass of imbecility as I find them to be. They will believe anything. I have tried them with balderdash, as you try toxics on a dog, increasing the dose each time; but I have never found I gave them more than they could swallow. I shall certainly end by being somebody; and you mustn’t blame me for it, but only the sapient laws of our country, which have given political power to the morally blind, deaf, and blear-eyed. If you tie a slippery rope to a housetop, and set a ladder beside the rope, you must expect people to prefer the ladder mode of ascension. Now, the slippery rope is hard work, the ladder is universal suffrage, and the housetop is honour and affluence. I have said.”

He spoke in a flippant, arrogant tone of persiflage; but it sounded rather as if he felt the humiliation of being seen in such apparently low estate by a man with whom he had lived on terms

of equality, and this had something to do with the affected self-complacency of his remarks. Charles de Niel had never much liked Sixte Marjolain, though his pleasant spirits and free-handed ways used to amuse him. He rated his companion at his proper value as being extravagant, good-tempered, not much loaded with heart, a liar by instinct, and brave neither morally nor physically. This was in their student-days. As Sixte Marjolain stood before him now, with his handsome selfish face, his *béret* jauntily perched on the side of his head, his moustache-tips waxed and twisted into hooks, and his sneering mouth ejecting tobacco-smoke by abrupt jets, it seemed to Charles de Niel as if all the evil characteristics of the man had deepened, whilst the good ones had diminished. He looked less blithe of mood and less generous than formerly, but more full of conceit and bombast; while the uneasy way in which he had halted on the beach, before recognising his friend, appeared to indicate that his courage was not of that sort which rages within lions.

“I suppose you belong to the International?” re-

marked Charles de Niel, with something of a shrug after a rapid survey of him.

"Of course," answered Marjolain, proceeding to roll a second cigarette, which he lighted with the remnant of the first. "I am very candid, though, in telling you that, for being a Public Prosecutor, you might have me arrested for the avowal. I shouldn't care though, for they wouldn't give me more than six months, and six months' imprisonment for the good cause, as we say in our clap-trap, would advance my political prospects wonderfully. I see, however, I may soon have another chance of advancement than that which I should gain by losing my liberty. Have you seen the papers to-night, 4th July? There is something about the candidature of a Prussian to the throne of Spain. This may stir up war. And if we only have a war and get sacked, in comes the Republic and up I go to the topmost rung of the ladder, like quicksilver when there's fire underneath. It's thinking of this brought me out to stroll in the moonlight. I've been to a wedding-supper, and wine and ambition combined have driven drowsiness away. Besides, if

you wait here another half-hour, you'll see the fisher-girls pass to meet the smacks at the creek yonder. Some of the girls are pretty and not straitlaced; I am on good terms with all the pretty ones." And he stroked his moustache, winking.

Charles de Niel did not attach much importance to the rumour of war; and he wished to cut short this interview, which was growing distasteful to him. He said coldly: "You must feel conscious yourself, Marjolain, of having fallen low indeed when you are reduced to hoping that we may be beaten in a war in order that you may rise. I wish I could have met you under pleasanter circumstances; but I am bound to warn you, both as an old comrade and as a magistrate, to keep out of the clutch of the law. If I were ever bound to prosecute you, I assure you I should do it without pity."

"I am convinced I could trust you to do that," laughed Marjolain carelessly; "but," added he, stung in his vanity, "who told you that I hoped for a defeat, or that I was dependent on it for my rise? I said that if we *were* sacked I should prosper; but the wise man has two strings to his bow, and one

of the strings should be feminine. What should you say if I were to marry a woman who would bring me a million for her dowry, who is of as good blood as yourself, and as beautiful as that sickle moon up above us, only younger and more tangible?"

If Sixte Marjolain had counted upon causing a sensation, he was served to his heart's desire. Charles de Niel started as if he had been struck. He turned on his companion with a face blanched of all its colour, and with eyeballs glaring: "Great God!" he exclaimed aloud, "if this should be the man!" and he laid a hard, nervous, menacing grasp on the engraver's shoulder.

"Tell me this woman's name, Marjolain," he hissed rather than spoke. "Tell me the truth—no hesitation or lying; for I shall find out."

Marjolain receded a step. His cigarette had dropped from his mouth, and he too had paled. He succeeded in disengaging himself from Niel's grasp.

"If you can find out," he said, "why ask me? I am not free to mention names."

"Is it Mademoiselle de Barre?" shouted Charles de Niel, following him and seizing him again so roughly that Marjolain lurched forward and almost lost his balance.

The engraver's self-possession abandoned him. He saw this was no moment for trifling.

"How did you learn?" he stammered, astonished as much as frightened.

Charles de Niel pushed him from him with such violence that Marjolain staggered on the shingle, and would have fallen but for the smack's rudder, against which he tottered.

"Oh, God in heaven!" moaned the young magistrate, pressing his hands to his forehead, "sooner she had been dead than this! A being of this sort, and I who had been thinking it could only be one of those men who set their stamp on history." He moaned again with a distress which would have been shocking for any one who loved him to witness. Then he became suddenly calm, and walked to where Marjolain was still leaning, rubbing his elbow in a scared way and wondering whether it would not be advisable to fly. "You

must tell me everything," he said, in exactly the same tone he used in interrogating a prisoner. "Tell me how it began and what are your schemes. Sit on the boat there, if you like."

Sixte Marjolain was moved by a moment's impulse to be rebellious, but a glance at Charles de Niel's firm-set face showed him he was not to be trifled with. He was no hero was M. Marjolain, and he made a clean breast of it.

There is no reason for our going through the avowals exactly as they were uttered, for they took a long time in delivery, were full of quibbles, reticences, and evasions, and had in many cases to be extracted piecemeal by cross-questions. Taken in its substance, however, the story was a very old and oft-told one. Viviane de Barre had met Sixte Marjolain accidentally. She had gone out with her maid under pretence of sketching on the cliff. Once there she had sent her maid to wander in search of flowers, and it is to be supposed from the confession she had made to Charles de Niel himself, that her intention was, in her bitter despondency, to commit suicide by throwing herself over the cliff.

Some sketches of hers, however, having got loose from her portfolio, were blown over the downs by the wind, at a moment when Marjolain, out loafing (it being a Monday), was passing by the spot; and he came hurrying up with them before she had risen from her sketching-stool to execute her self-murderous design. At a glance they were attracted towards each other, or rather, he simply admired her beauty; whilst she, in her romantic and morbid agitation, not only admired *his* beauty, but judged from his educated language and well-bred manners, forming such a contrast to his dress, that he was one of those struggling geniuses with whom young girls' dreams are peopled. He was clever and plausible, though lazy and weak, and he soon introduced himself to her with a well-conceived story, which took a powerful hold of her imagination. He was an inborn artist, persecuted by his family for his vocation, and he was working for his bread. He might live at home in undignified and servile ease if he pleased, but he was ambitious of fame, and would not enter into any compromise with his self-esteem. These points of his story so like her own

could not but kindle her sympathy. She met him again on the cliff, not by appointment but by seeming accident, though of course it was only "seeming." Then they saw each other more frequently, till her interest for him changed into love and took possession of her life. It is popularly accepted that women have the power of seeing through a man and detecting all that is false in him. This power would appear to serve them only with men they do not love, for Viviane de Barre never suspected Sixte Marjolain. She wove her own generous fancies round his descriptions of himself, took him for her hero, worshipped him, confided in him, and would listen to the recital of his imaginary struggles, his hopes, his disappointments, as if chapters of Holy Writ were being read to her. They never could see each other anywhere but in the open air, in a museum or a church; but once a day at least Sixte passed by her father's house at an appointed hour, that they might exchange glances. As soon as she should be of age she had sworn most solemnly to marry him. This was the tale in its simplicity. Sixte Marjolain related it in a way to

show that the love was all on Viviane's side, not on his. He looked to the profit of the match, feeling sure that the De Barres would not disinherit their only child, though they might at first threaten to do so. Viviane had often offered him money out of her allowance to help him set up a studio; but though she had cried at his refusal to accept it, he had been wise enough to persist in this refusal, in order that his disinterestedness might remain above suspicion. He wound up by declaring that the marriage would take place, notwithstanding all impediments that might be thrown into his way by Charles de Niel or anybody else, "unless something better turned up"—the "something better" being probably, in his eyes, another match where there would be as much money, but less risks; or a revolutionary wind-fall which should make him rich at a sweep and spare him the necessity of marrying at all; this last, much the cheeriest prospect.

Dawn had broken when Marjolain, in some extenuation of tongue and mind, came to the end of his compulsory recital. Charles de Niel said but a dozen words to him in final reply, and these words

were a fair warning that Mdlle. de Barre should be apprised of all the real circumstances of Sixte's life and character. At this, M. Sixte shrugged his shoulders scoffingly.

"You may tell her what you please," he said. "It will harm you in her opinion more than me." And upon this they parted.

Charles de Niel returned to his hotel, threw himself dressed on his bed, and lay there, not sleeping, but in a fever of thought, for two hours. At nine he rose, and changed his evening clothes for morning ones, and at ten o'clock set out on foot for the house of President de Barre. He was to have the privilege of calling every day—that was understood; and so, though the hour was a little early, Madame de Barre received him without surprise, cordially. She was in the garden with Viviane, working at tapestry; but after a few moments' desultory conversation, she made a pretence of having something to fetch indoors, and left the supposed lovers alone, thinking to please them. Charles de Niel did not pause one moment before discharging what he had

deliberately judged to be a sacred duty. He was seated on a garden stool, she on a chair underneath a tree. He leaned forward, and said, in a quiet, firm voice: "Mademoiselle, I have come to warn you that the man on whom you have bestowed your affections can never make you happy. He is altogether unworthy of you."

She rose, shivering with amazement from head to foot, dropped her work, and flashed at him a look of such indignation and contempt that any man might well have recoiled. But he had come prepared for this, and, though he flushed under her scathing glance, he made a movement of his hand, as though to say: "Only hear me to the end. You shall speak afterwards." She sat down again with a sort of shrug; he drew his seat closer to hers, and spoke. It was not a denunciatory speech. He exaggerated nothing: he simply described Sixte Marjolain as he knew him; and the bare truth, in this instance, would have been convincing enough to anybody not biassed. But when was woman in love not biassed? Unfortunate Charles de Niel did not know women—least of all a woman in love. Had

Viviane's face been of marble, sculptured to express the image of Disdain, it could not have been more rigidly fixed in cold scorn and indifference than it was during the whole time Charles de Niel spoke. She seemed not to hear, not to care, not to be aware of his presence. She took up her fallen tapestry and worked at it. Only once, when he made some revelation on which he had earnestly relied to destroy her love for the man so beneath her, a flitting smile of contempt more than usually strong curled her lip. This speechless attitude unnerved Charles de Niel. Had she cried, protested, argued with him, abused him even, his fortitude would not have been impaired. But this ineffable scorn and unbelief froze and finally silenced him. He broke off, looked at her in dismay, and faltered: "So it is possible that I have not yet succeeded in convincing you?"

She rose and laughed outright—a laugh full of hatred, disdain, and defiance. Her eyes were aglow, and her beautiful face, which had turned ashè white at his first words, had now become crimson in its passion.

"Listen, Monsieur de Niel," she answered calmly, thrusting each word like a dagger's point. "Yesterday, I thought you were a man of honour, and I thanked God on my knees—yes, on my knees—this night for having sent me such a friend. I see now that you are like the rest. In Sixte Marjolain's world, when a man has anything to say of another he speaks it frankly before his face; in ours, it is the fashion to traduce a rival behind his back, to breathe venomous calumnies upon him, not one of which the speaker would dare utter aloud. If you have a face that can blush at a woman's contempt, M. de Niel, let me never see you again. Inform my parents of my secret if you please; it is indifferent to me. If you do, I shall act as I told you I would yesterday. As to your slanders, hark to this. If you were to swear all you have just said by your hopes of salvation, I would not believe you; if you were to swear it me on your dying pillow, with the crucifix of the Saviour held before your eyes, I would not believe you; nay, if I were to see with my own eyes the things you have foully invented, I would sooner doubt the evidence of my senses than

believe Sixte Marjolain capable of anything that is not noble, generous, and true."

When love rises to such proportions as this, even simple men like Charles de Niel can understand its majesty. He bent his head without a word. He had nothing more to say.

III.

Some ten months after this the city of M—— was in some commotion, the reason being this, that an attempt to establish a commune like that of Paris had been made there and had failed. A couple of days' fighting had got the better of the insurgents' valour; a few days' shooting and pursuing had got the better of their political constancy; and the scene was one of rebels being hunted out of cellars, garrets, sewer-pipes, under all the disguises one can imagine, vowing their innocence as soon as caught, and whining for mercy. This is not a pleasant picture. But the fugitives seemed to consider that shooting was not pleasant either.

The ringleaders had, as usual, with scarcely a

single exception, escaped. That is always the way with ringleaders. Detectives were watching for them at street corners, sending telegraphic despatches about them, posting descriptions of their persons on dead walls, and in a general way looking for them with great energy wherever they were least likely to be found. Among the rogues being thus hunted for was the man described on the posters as "The so-called General Sixte Marjolain."

M. Marjolain had been quite right in his provisions of what his country's defeat might do for him. The 4th September revolution had caused him to be elected a Commandant of National Guards; the Communal insurrection had made a General of him. He had done little fighting in either military capacity. While the Prussian war lasted he had decided that he could be more useful to the Republic he loved by remaining at M——, and guarding its interests, than by going to fight under Chanzy on the Loire, and so risking the life of a good fellow and a staunch radical. During his few days' generalship he had been too much occupied in taking care of some public money he and

his men had discovered in the municipal coffers, to have a thought for anything else. This, however, did not lessen the peril of his position. On the contrary, it was pretended that to cover his retreat, when the chase after him had become rather too pressing, he had ordered some acolytes of his to set fire to a block of houses, after the now approved democratic method, that is, with petroleum. He was well known from having strutted about so complacently in his uniform during war time. There were photographs of him, booted and spurred, in shop windows. The detectives seemed more anxious to find him than anybody else. After a few days' hunting, it was said they had received positive information that he was lurking in a house on the eastern outskirts of the city, but in which particular house they were as yet unaware.

It so happened that in one of the suspected dwellings lodged Charles de Niel. Nine months had dealt radically with him too. In the first place, he had been of course deprived of his office when the Republicans came in after Sedan, and in the next the collapse of several financial and Imperial

companies, in which most of his father's fortune was invested, had nearly ruined him. This catastrophe had killed his father, and the troubles of all sorts resulting from the war had also hastened his mother's end. He was now an orphan, without any near relative to care for or be cared for by. During the campaign he had fought on the Loire as a private soldier. At the peace he had come to live at M——, where the Communal insurrection had taken him unawares—so much so, indeed, that he had had no means of joining the regular forces which were putting down the rebellion. He had remained indoors during all the fighting; and also during the few days' turmoil afterwards. His means of living were some hundred thousand francs he had managed to save from the wreck of his family property. As soon as the country was quiet again he thought of practising at the bar. One may add that he was viewed with some mistrust in M——, not because he was an ex-Bonapartist, but because he was ruined.

Thus much for his material circumstances. As to his moral condition, it had been noticed by all

who knew Charles de Niel that in that first week in July, '70, when his marriage had begun to be talked of, a complete and curious change had come over him. It was like a sudden, subtle deterioration of all the faculties which conduce to activity, ambition, interest in life; but no one guessed the reason of this transformation as we can do. Charles de Niel had not seen Viviane since that morning when she had ordered him never to come into her presence again. A few days later the war had broken out, he had been recalled hastily to his post, and the events which followed in rapid succession having necessarily adjourned all matrimonial schemes, he had been able to confine himself to a merely formal correspondence with the De Barres, without this being deemed at all odd. He had not disclosed Viviane's secret either to her parents or to anybody else. He suffered people to believe that he was going to marry her, and they did believe it, until after the loss of his fortune he wrote, as in duty bound, to say that being no longer in a position to support a wife, he begged leave to withdraw from the engagement. This method of proceeding,

tallying so completely with French notions of the becoming, President de Barre had merely replied that he was grieved to hear of Charles's beravement and losses, that he would have given him his daughter all the same (which was not true), but that since M. Charles deemed it well to retract his engagement, he could not but defer to his wishes. So Charles de Niel was free, as well as orphaned, ruined, and well-nigh friendless.

But not free in mind. Ever since the hour when he had first seen Viviane, and especially since that hideous moment when she had accused him of calumny, he had known no peace. He had carried about her image with him everywhere — on the battle-fields, in solitude, amid all his sorrows. His friends called him changed. He was like a man who carried the stigma of a crime with him. From the moment she, who was all in all to him, suspected his honour, it was as if the entire world despised him. His ambition had all now converged to one fixed idea, and that engrossed him as ideas do engross men to whom thought comes slowly. He wished to clear himself in her sight, no matter at

what cost, no matter how. If he could bring Viviane to see that he had spoken truthfully, and from no other motive but her welfare, he would ask for nothing more. He would be willing to die the next minute.

It was evening when the military and the police arrived to explore the suburb where the ex-Pro-cureur lived. Charles de Niel was reading at his table by lamplight. The house where he lodged was in a quiet street, with villas all detached, and standing in gardens; the least noise of carriage-wheels or steps could be heard from one end of the thoroughfare to the other. Of a sudden—it must have been towards nine at night—Charles de Niel did hear sounds which had become very familiar—namely, the tramping of soldiers in great numbers, both before and behind the house. He got up, lifted a corner of a curtain, and saw that his own villa, and those adjoining it on both sides, were surrounded. It mattered little to him. He sat down again to read, and would have continued to remain where he was, despite all the tramping; but before he had been seated a minute, another and dif-

ferent noise struck his ear. This time it was a clambering over a wall close to his window—then a soft fall. He was on a ground-floor parlour, looking to the front, but there was another room that served to dine in, and which led out of that where he was sitting; the door of it was open, and it was from that direction that the noise came. He held his breath and listened. There was a rapping at the window-panes which looked on to the garden; somebody was knocking. Charles de Niel rose, walked fearlessly into the other room, and opened the window. A man emerged from the darkness and rushed in, haggard, scared, and with clothes torn; he held a revolver in his hand, and but for that would have had all the appearance of a hunted beast, which he was. Though circumstances and terror had altered him, the man was easy to recognise. It was Sixte Marjolain.

There was a moment's wonder-stricken silence, and the two men looked at each other without a word; but at sight of Niel a ghastly look of despair had shot swiftly across the hunted rebel's face. He turned instinctively as if he would have bolted

again; but he had not the strength left. So he threw his revolver down, and said in a choked voice, the voice of a man at bay: "I am at your mercy, Niel; remember that, though you once said you would show me none." And he sank shivering into a seat.

Charles de Niel for a moment made no answer. He eyed the trembling wretch before him with a look half of wonder half of pity. Then another expression stole over his features. He walked up to Sixte Marjolain, rested a hand on his shoulder, and said in a peculiar voice: "Listen, and answer quickly, Sixte; does *she* still love you?"

"Yes," faltered Sixte, amazed and shrinking.

"She believes in you?"

"Yes." (This was rather an impatient nod than a word.)

"And she is still determined to marry you?"

"She will not marry me now, because in another ten minutes I shall be arrested, and in another six months dead," answered Marjolain, with a dogged and expressive gesture at the windows, outside of which the tramping and voices of soldiers were

heard growing louder. "But if it had not been for this," added he, with some fire of defiance rising to his eyes, "she would have married me."

"Then stand up," said Charles de Niel, with perfect calm. "Now lift up your hand, and swear after me. Swear to be an honest man, and to be faithful and good to her. On that condition I save you."

"Save me!" gasped Marjolain, with feverish exultation; "save me, how?"

"Will you swear?" asked Charles de Niel.

"I will do more than swear; I will keep my oath," faltered Marjolain, with eyes full of anguish, as if with the fear that he was being hoaxed; and he extended his hand.

Charles de Niel nodded, went to a bureau and unlocked it. He took out a few notes and a pocket-book.

"Here is money and a passport," he said; "you can hide in the cellar whilst I go out and say that it is I who am Sixte Marjolain. They do not know me, so they will arrest me, and when I have been

led off you can escape. By the time they find out who I am you will have got clear away and will not harm me."

Marjolain muttered some thanks, but Niel cut these short. He took the Communist by the arm, led him out of the room, and down a staircase, into a small wood-cellar. At the moment of closing the door and handing his rival the key, he said, quite quietly, but looking Sixte Marjolain in the face again: "Remember, an oath is a serious thing, Sixte, and even you who affect to believe in nothing may acknowledge that it was a Providence which placed me on your path to-night. Try and profit by the lesson."

These were his last words. When Marjolain left the cellar an hour afterwards, the quarter was deserted. There were no soldiers there, and Marjolain's passport took him safely through all the streets of the town and past all the sentries. It was only a few days later, when he had safely crossed the French frontier, that he learned this: that the notorious Sixte Marjolain had been arrested and shot. He had not been tried by court-martial. The officer

who apprehended him had received previous orders to execute him summarily.

IV.

The mistake in identity was never discovered, for Frenchmen, especially criminals, are buried within four-and-twenty hours of death. The real Sixte Marjolain recently returned to France, under a new name, and married Viviane. The parents were opposed to the marriage of their daughter to a Swiss adventurer—for he gave himself out for a Swiss artist—but Mdlle. Viviane was of age; so, from necessity they granted their consent. Whether the “adventurer” keeps the oath he swore as the price of his life is a secret only known to himself, his wife, and the man who was interred under his name. But many so-called “free-thinkers” make a religion of superstition, and Sixte Marjolain was superstitious. He believed in the power of dead men to haunt and punish live ones.

THE SCEPTIC.

THE SCEPTIC:

A TALE OF MARRIED LIFE.

I.

MID-DAY Mass being ended in the church of St. Wolfram, of the town of A——, the holy building was emptied of all its worshippers, excepting some twenty ladies, who grouped themselves on rush-chairs near the different confessionals. It was a Friday, and there were consequently no weddings. The penitents had the church all to themselves, and the solemn silence was eminently suited to pious meditation. However, the penitents being for the most part old spinsters, preferred to chatter in whispers; confession was to them a refreshing break in the week's solitary idleness, and they made the most of it.

Truth compels one to admit that the ladies were

unequally distributed, for not less than twelve out of the twenty were gathered round the confessional of l'Abbé Mouillot. But you had only to look at this comely priest waddling across the aisle from the sacristy to understand how great a favourite he must needs be. He was plump and rosy, and his silvery hair, which fluffed over his smooth forehead, crowned a face in which dimples and benevolence had an equal part with serenity and playful humour. No man had more indulgence than he for little sins or large ones. His gentle chiding brought greater comfort than the absolution of other priests; and, what is more, he was possessed of inexhaustible patience—hurrying no one, suffering his penitents to disclose their sins in their own way, and only encouraging them with a kindly word when, by a pause of undue length, they seemed to appeal for it. We must decline to entertain the supposition that if l'Abbé Mouillot sat out long confessions so obligingly, it was because he dropped off placidly to sleep at their commencement. The Abbé having entered his confessional and closed the door, the lady first on the rank stepped out and knelt in one of the lateral

boxes, and the remainder, feigning to keep their eyes on their missals, settled down to a comfortable tattle.

"That's the Colonel's sister," remarked one spinster.

"If she confess but half what is on her conscience, we shall have to wait an hour," mumbled a second, and both tittered.

At this moment the folding-doors of the church were softly pushed back, and a feminine form glided towards the holy-water basin. In the dim light of the entrance it could be seen that she was attired with more taste and richness than are usual in country towns, and that she wore a veil. Approaching the confessional, she lifted the veil, and then a murmur of astonishment and curiosity ran round.

"It is Madame Paul d'Arlay!"

"Oh, oh! her husband has renounced the devil then!"

"What can have brought her two leagues to confession? There is a good church enough at St. Ricquier."

"And see how flurried she looks! One may guess her two years' honeymoon has been chequered with a cloud at last."

"Dear Madame d'Arley, how delighted we are to see you looking so fresh and lovely! We hope your dear husband and child are quite well."

The lady thus addressed with evident respect, and for whom all the penitents made way, was the wife of Paul d'Arley, one of the greatest of French novelists and play-wrights. He had achieved his brilliant reputation when young, and it had increased with every new work he produced, because he wrote little, and for fame, not profit. At forty, having just been elected—some ten years before the customary age—to the French Academy, he had astonished everybody by marrying a pretty dowerless girl of twenty, the daughter of a country gentleman, and since his marriage he had lived a retired life on a little estate which he had bought near St. Ricquier. He was so distinguished a man that the families around felt honoured by his settling among them, but it was deemed singular that he should break so completely with Parisian society, which had

idolised him, and it was thought stranger still that, sceptic as he was, he should have married into a family remarkable for religious devoutness. Paul d'Arley was, indeed, considerably more than a sceptic: he had been called the successor of Voltaire. He was an atheist of the aggressive sort, who had never feigned conformity, as most of his countrymen do, but who, like Edmond About, Emile Augier, and Ste. Beuve, had missed no occasion of assailing the Catholic Church with irony and bitterly contemptuous ridicule. Every one of his works had been banned by the Papal Index, much to his amusement, and his last book, published about a year before his marriage, had attained a success of startling proportions, by being denounced in episcopal mandates throughout every diocese in France. It was conceivable that after this a devout Catholic should have given his daughter to Paul d'Arley, in the hope that marriage might reclaim him; but it was inconceivable that the renowned author should have been impelled to his ill-assorted marriage, unless it were from the fascination of Aimée Deschamps' pretty face.

People generally accepted this explanation, for Madame d'Arlay's was just one of those faces that turn men's heads. Small and daintily rounded, she had large soft blue eyes, rich and wavy chestnut hair, and an adorable little mouth, over which a sweet smile was always playing like sunlight. There was no particular expression on her features but that of amiability. She looked good and weak; unable to say no, and not very sure whether she ought to say yes. A physiognomist would not have expected intellect from her, and yet it would have surprised anybody to see her do or say anything that was foolish. She was a Frenchwoman to her finger-tips; dressed and walked well; carried herself without embarrassment or effrontery; had little graces of gesture, glance, and manner, which proved consciousness of always having admiring or critical eyes bent on her; and summed up in her attractive person all the outward perfections of the gentlewoman. She had been agitated on entering the church, but it was good to see how, in the presence of older members of her sex, she at once resumed her composure; gave to each the bow and civil

word that was correct, and took her place modestly on the furthest chair to wait her turn.

She would have to wait long if deference for her husband's celebrity, and perhaps inquisitiveness to see how the wife of so eminent a reprobate would demean herself at the tribunal of penitence, had not induced the other ladies to waive their precedence. When the Colonel's sister had finished—and to do this lady justice, she had settled her little account with Heaven in half-an-hour—the next lady motioned to Madame d'Arley, and the others ratified this arrangement by polite smirks. Madame d'Arley reddened a little as she accepted the courtesy, but it was manifestly very welcome to her, and gracefully bowing her acknowledgments, she passed into the confessional and dropped on her knees. Then she heaved a sigh.

"Father, it is I, Madame d'Arley," she whispered through the grating. "I told you the other day that I wished to consult you on something very important, and I have taken advantage of my husband being absent on a visit to drive into A——."

"It will give me pleasure to hear you, my

daughter," answered the priest's kind voice. "When I last dined at your charming house I noticed that you were pre-occupied, but I have been hoping that your little troubles were more imaginary than real."

"O Father! they are not little troubles—no woman was ever so unhappy as I am!" moaned Madame d'Arley. "I am devoured by the sin of curiosity; it leaves me no peace; it will make me ill before long if I do not yield to it. Can you fancy that, although I have been married two years, my husband will not allow me to read one of his books!"

"Ah!"

"No, he forbids me. There is not a copy of his works in our house—if friends come to see us, he contrives to change the conversation as soon as it turns on his writings, and if I question him myself, he closes my lips with a joke. He is so affectionate and gentle that I bore with this for a time, though it cost me many a pang, but latterly we have been visited by that Madame de Marœuil whom you saw at our table the other night—a young widow, very forward and ill-natured, who I am sure wanted to

marry Paul, and who takes a delight in making me miserable."

"Come, come, my daughter"——

"Ah, but it's true, else why should she compliment me so tauntingly on not having read my own husband's books? She has an aggravating way about her which makes a woman's blood tingle. She recurs to the subject at all hours; hinting that the books are full of attacks on religion, immoral, abounding in details about Paul's early life; and that my husband and I are both acting very properly, he in forbidding me to read them, I in obeying him. Was there ever a more humiliating position for a wife? So I am to be the only woman in France who is not to know the writings which have made my Paul's reputation, and our boy, who will grow up to glory in his father's name, will pore over books which his mother has never opened! Tell me, Father, that I may go and buy the works to read in private, for I feel I am being treated like a child."

Now l'Abbé Mouillot was not one of those priests who creep into houses and lead captive silly women. He was an honest man, who, perhaps because he

was a little dull, had never understood that spiritual fervour should impel a priest to put man and wife asunder. He had not read Paul d'Arley's excommunicated books, but had heard of them, and well guessed why their author should object to let such dangerous literature be perused by a young and innocent wife, on whom he doted. There are well-meaning priests who would have advised Aimée d'Arley by all means to read the books, and to try persistently to convert her husband, in order that he might write no more like them. But l'Abbé Mouillot knew what perils lurk under such injudicious counsels. He had received courtesy and kindness from Paul d'Arley, respected his honourable character, could not help revering his genius, and the advice which he gave to the author's wife was that of a friend and peacemaker.

"My daughter, your first duty is to obey your husband," he said with gentle firmness. "Admitting that M. d'Arley does not share your faith, God has ways of His own for bringing back His lost sheep, and a wife should be an instrument of happiness in her household, not contention."

"But it is so hard to be told that one's husband has written this and that, and not to be able to join with people in their admiration or rebut their criticisms."

"It is a trial, but wait patiently. Your husband will, no doubt, end by removing his prohibition, and you will be the more contented then for having passed submissively through your ordeal."

"You have no pity for me," murmured Aimée. "It may be years before my husband relents, and Mdme. de Marceuil says the books are so interesting!"

"Heigh, there we have it!" exclaimed the priest, whose voice betokened that he was smiling. "The serpent has tempted you to eat of the tree of knowledge of Good and Evil, and, after exhausting ingenious reasons for succumbing, you are obliged to confess the true one. Go home, my dear daughter, and read in the 3rd chapter of Genesis what the sin of curiosity and disobedience cost our first mother. Your home is a little paradise—see that you do not throw away its tranquil joys."

Mdme. d'Arley rose from her knees, looking

calm; but her body was in a fever. She had hoped the priest would ratify the sophistries she had formed to justify her in disobeying, and his refusal to do so added to the irritation of her nerves without allaying any of the desires that seethed in her mind. She had been too much petted not to resent any crossing of her wishes as an unkindness, and if it had not been for the sacredness of the spot she would have burst out crying.

The sun was shining gloriously, and the streets were full of mid-day bustle as she emerged from the church and made her way with quick steps towards the market-place, where her carriage was waiting. But why, instead of crossing the market-place, did she abruptly pause and turn, reddening, down a side-street? There was a bookseller's shop a few doors down, and in the window was conspicuously displayed a yellow placard, advertising in red and black letters the "Complete Works of Paul d'Arley, of the French Academy."

There they were, the works—four novels and five plays—in bright new covers, pink and primrose,

with titles alluring enough to open the eyes of a blind man.

Aimée's bosom heaved fast, and the throbbings of her heart became physically painful. Once—twice she turned away and retraced her steps. The third time a customer was coming out of the shop, and fancying she was about to enter, stood aside to let her pass; here was the temptation; she seized it and walked in.

"Have you *all* Paul d'Arley's works?"

"Yes, Madame; the last editions have just come from Paris."

"I will buy the complete set, please," said Aimée, in a voice that quavered.

II.

"The Elms," Paul d'Arley's country seat—within bow-shot of the ancient abbey-town of St. Ricquier, now dwindled into a village—was dignified, like most French country houses, with the title of *château*. It was a pretty, modern mansion, nestling amid

clumps of the trees from which the estate derived its name, and surrounded by an expanse of lawn and shrubberies, which was large or small according as you called it garden or park. Mdme. d'Arley insisted it was a park; the author styled it *jardinet* (diminutive garden), and similar contestations went on between them as to the correct appellations of a conservatory and dovecot, which Aimée was for dubbing Orangery and Tower respectively, while her incredulous husband submitted that he would take up with these names when the one had produced an orange and the other stood a siege.

Such as it was, Paul d'Arley loved the place well. Those who wondered that he should settle so contentedly in retirement had little knowledge of his character, and less understanding of the satiety which comes of long indulgence in the pleasures of big cities. D'Arley had lived for twenty years in the most brilliant society of Paris—the equal of princes and statesmen, the pet of great ladies, actresses, and artists, the envy of tyros. Few men had enjoyed life as he had, or better deserved to enjoy it; for he had carved his way to fame and fortune

without patronage or charlatanry, by mere dint of hard toil and talent. Every work he had produced, whether novel or play, had cost him more than two years' reflection and assiduous labour; and lest this should seem strange to fertile literary manufacturers in these our times, it may be added that d'Arley had received repeated offers of large sums to work faster, but had declined, alleging rather scornfully that he would print nothing that could not be bequeathed to posterity.

To do his country neighbours justice, there was little in the great author's works to encourage a belief that he would ever develop into a family man; for he had been a contemner of marriage. He had, in fact, derided most things which the simple reverence. Taking exceptional, and often morbid, passions for his texts, he had employed the resources of incomparable style, masterly perception of character, dramatic power and descriptive facility unrivalled, to defend—nay extol—offences against what the world terms morals, and he social prejudices. France is the only country where theories such as his durst be published; and even Frenchmen, so tolerant of

startling paradoxes, would not have brooked from an author of less genius philosophy so deliberately cynical and axioms insultingly launched against all the conventions that hold society together. What saved Paul d'Arley was, next to his talent, his evident good faith, and for this reason no one would have applied an epithet of reprobation to his works. They were books over which thinkers pondered, and which *dilettanti* studied as splendid works of art. But to the vulgar they were poison, and d'Arley knew this so well that from the day of his marriage he had taken the most careful precaution that his wife should not read them.

For the truth is, he deeply loved his fair young wife. After draining the intoxicating cup of worldly excitements, he had discovered that there is in domestic happiness a greater joy than all, and he was sincerely grateful to the woman who had revealed this to him. Her gods were not his, but in the practices of her innocent devotions he found a secret charm stirring the innermost chords of his heart. When she knelt down to say her prayers at night, and invoke blessings on his head—when she

set out in cold or rain to church, or conformed to the laws of her religion as to fasting—when he saw her act at all times as if an invisible eye were controlling her conduct, it was as if some beautiful scene of poetical legendry were being performed before him. She did not know how often he shaded his eyes to watch her making the sign of the cross, nor divine what was passing in his mind when he would sit down beside her, and, taking her hands in his, ask her to relate him some stories from her Bible. He did not believe in these things. To him they were fables, silly or sublime; but not for the world would he have shaken his wife's faith in them; and gradually there had grown up in him a feeling that he would rather his son, and any other children he might have, should grow up to be God-fearing like their mother than infidels like himself. He looked forward to an age when mankind should be guided wholly by reason; but felt that this age had not yet come—for his wife.

So he lived happy, falsifying all conjectures, puzzling every observer. He was a handsome man, rather above the middle height, a little bald and

shortsighted, but constitutionally strong, thanks to regular diet and exercise. With his waxed moustache, high forehead, and firm chin, he looked like a soldier. His face teemed with expression, but the expression was not soft, for like all men who have been much criticised he was a trifle arrogant, and the easy rapidity of his rise in life made him speak with too much contempt of those who had been less fortunate than himself. He would not admit that he owed anything to exceptional abilities. He said it was only hard work that had made him; and one of his grievances against religion was that it taught men to rely on idle supplications rather than on the courageous self-exertions which he for his own part had found enough to conquer all difficulties. It was not surprising that such a man should have earned a character for hardness and pride, and yet never did a man yield himself more good-humouredly to the domination of a young wife. His tenderness, playful gentleness, and cheerful submission to all her wishes, were things to see; the little woman had wholly subjugated him, and not until two years after his marriage did he leave her for a single day. It

was a summons to the bedside of a relative who was thought to be dying which had induced him very reluctantly to quit her at last, and which had also afforded Aimée the opportunity of going to A—— and buying his books, as we have seen. Paul d'Arley had counted on being away three days; he was compelled to remain absent more than three weeks, and when he was at last free to return he travelled back to St. Ricquier with a yearning impatience to resume the peaceful life to which this brief interruption had but added new charms.

But he had no sooner set foot in his house than he perceived some great change had occurred.

It was Ash Wednesday, and Paul, as he journeyed in the train, had been telling himself with pathetic amusement that he should find his wife in a black dress—for like a good Catholic she wore dark attire on fast days—and be regaled with a fish dinner. But Aimée came to the door and met him, tricked out in silks and colours, and with her hair piled up in some extraordinary Parisian fashion. There was more of the woman, less of the wife and

mother in her, and she seemed excited, though her greeting was gushingly affectionate. When Paul went upstairs to change his dress, he noticed in passing through his wife's room that the crucifix which used to hang over the bed had been removed, but thinking it might be in repair he paid little attention. When, however, on coming downstairs he found the dining-room ablaze with wax-candles, the table decked with flowers, and a prettily written *menu* of rich dainties lying beside his glass, he was astonished, and glanced at Aimée. She was sitting red and nervous, as if playing a part.

"My dear child, you must have mislaid your almanack," he said, smiling. "This is a fast day."

"Yes, dear, I know it is," replied Aimée, in a voice that slightly trembled.

"Well, but we shall both be excommunicated together. Has our good bishop given you an indulgence?"

"What need of indulgences, Paul? I agree with you that it is time women shook off the superstitions which pervert all enjoyment of the good things of life into sins."

There was a moment's silence. Paul d'Arley had turned white as the tablecloth, and motioned to the servant to retire.

"I am not aware that I ever told you that, Aimée."

"No, but you have written it—and oh, Paul, don't be angry with me, but I have been reading all your books!" She crossed the room, and threw herself at his feet, embracing him with both her arms and gazing into his face with endearing entreaty. "I could not resist any longer, darling, and I know now why you kept your writings from me, fearing I should be too childish to understand them. But do not dread that. Some of the things frightened me at first and made me cry, but as I went on reading the scales dropped off my eyes. Oh, how silly you must have thought me with my little mummeries and foolish creeds—but you are so great, noble, and good, and never let me see what you thought in your tender unwillingness to wound me! Why are you trembling, dearest? I mean to be your own wife now, the sharer of your glory and of all your thoughts. Everything that I had learned

has been clean sponged away, and my heart and mind are like the blank pages of a new book on which you shall write what beliefs you please. Look up at me, dearest. I never knew how much I loved you till I guessed from your works what a sacrifice you had made in marrying a silly little thing like me!"

Words cannot depict the desolate expression that had settled on Paul d'Arley's face as his wife spoke. He had started to his feet mechanically, assisting her to rise, and she recoiled at seeing him stand speechless, as if an irremediable catastrophe had overtaken him. When he spoke at length it was with a groan.

"Tell me the truth, Aimée: it was Madame de Marœuil who lent you those books?"

"No, no, Paul; I went into the town and bought them myself. But why do you look at me like that, dear? You frighten me."

"Unhappy child! I am sure it was Madame de Marœuil who advised you to buy them," he murmured; then abruptly he tossed his head and broke out with a wrath that was awful: "Woe betide that

woman! She has come into my house with a torch, and let her see to herself! I will wreak a vengeance on her that shall wring ten thousand tears from her eyes for every one that she has made you shed."

Aimée uttered a cry and attempted to restrain her husband; but he disengaged himself, rushed from the room and hurried to the stables. The groom who was there thought his master had gone mad, for Paul shouted for a saddle, helped to strap it on, and before the bit was fairly in the horse's mouth sprang into the stirrups and spurred into the night at full gallop. He rode towards the house where Madame de Marœuil lived, about five miles off, and some of the tardy peasants who met him on the road must have thought of him as the groom did—or that he was possessed of the devil, for they were pious people in those parts.

Madame de Marœuil was far from expecting such a visit. She was a handsome young widow, thoroughly Parisian, cool, coquettish, and heartless. Married early to a man old enough to be her grandfather, she had hailed her widowhood as a merciful

release, and had lost no time in setting her cap at Paul d'Arley, whose fame, polished manners, and manly character had fascinated her. But it was not out of spite at having been rebuffed by him that she had tried to push his wife to disobedience. Madame de Marœuil was one of those women who do harm by nature, as nettles sting. To tattle and invent scandal, to estrange wife from husband, and lend a hand to intrigues in which the honour of families was blasted, were to her mere pastimes. As to connubial relations, she had a theory that among men there is not one but that is peccant, and she argued that women owe each other mutual protection to resist marital tyranny. This did not prevent her abusing her own sex in the hearing of men and despising it cordially in secret.

It chanced that when Paul d'Arley arrived Madame de Marœuil was reading one of his best novels, *La Femme d'un Sot*, which she had perused many times from detecting several comforting analogies between herself and the heroine. She gave a start at hearing the door-bell violently clang; but before she could run to the window, Paul had darted

into the room, covered with mud, breathless and menacing. Without taking off his hat he rushed to her and seized her frail wrists as if he would break them.

"Wretched woman, what infernal spirit of mischief led you to disturb my wife's mind with those books of mine?"

"Don't, Monsieur d'Arlay, you're hurting me!" she cried in terror. "I never advised Madame d'Arlay to read your books."

"You are lying!" he raved. "When I suffered you to visit my wife, I warned you of the conditions on which alone you might do it. I mistrusted your viperous tongue from the first."

Madame de Marœuil's features had blanched under Paul's flaming eyes. She struggled, panting, to free herself.

"I tell you to release me, sir, or I shall scream. I never did more than mention your books to your wife."

"Ah, that's it!" shouted Paul, pushing her back so roughly that she staggered. "You went in your hateful malice and excited her curiosity; but what

have you given the poor little thing in exchange for that faith you destroyed in her? Could you endow her with the strong mind of a man to enable her to replace by unwavering reason the comfort which her religion brought her in every hour of trial? No; you never had such a thought; but in trying to soil the child's angel robe you only aimed at making her a demon of worldliness and depravity like yourself! But now quail—for as I am a living man you shall repent of what you have done! I will write a book, and expose you in it as in a pillory; and you shall become so infamous that the lowest of your sex shall point their fingers at you!”

Madame de Marœuil bounded under this brutal threat.

“Ah, this is too much!” she exclaimed. “Your wife has been perverted by your books. Well, I am glad of it! This is the retribution on you for the misery of thousands of other women whom your books have ruined. There was a time when I too believed that there was another world where the wretchedness of this life was compensated; but you, and others like you, who are the perdition of our

country, scoffed these illusions away, and what did you give me in exchange but the fine philosophy, that as we have nothing to live for, nothing to hope for, we should be stupid indeed not to get what pleasure we can out of this world? Ah! so you think to shatter the Cross in every household, and then to plant it as a talisman on your own hearth. But there is some justice yet! You have thrown your impious books at God, and He has hurled them back on your roof-tree. So much the better!" and darting to the bell she pulled it. A servant appeared. "Show out M. d'Arley," she cried.

III.

Not long after this the Paris papers announced that Paul d'Arley and his charming young wife had taken a house in the Champs Elysées, and were coming to spend a few months there. As the private lives of great authors offer an engrossing interest to the French public, minutely accurate accounts were given of the Hôtel d'Arley, and of Paul's rea-

sons for hiring it. It was said that so Parisian a writer could not languish away from a city which is to all other cities what the sun is to the planetary system, and that he was impatient to exhibit to the world the winsome little woman who had detained him so long in exile. In the course of a few days cards were issued for Madame d'Arlay's first "At home."

Few guessed with what anguish Paul had drawn himself away from the "Elms;" and if we say few instead of none, it is because Madame Marceuil had maliciously bruited the "ridiculous scene" which had taken place at her house, so that there were some who were aware that a skeleton existed in the great author's family cupboard. Paul had striven hard to undo the evil that had been wrought; and for several days tried everything that patient ingenuity and tender earnestness could suggest to bring back his wife to her discarded beliefs. But Faith is like a temple: when ruined, it can be rebuilt, but not in a week. Aimée was possessed with a burning desire to go to Paris and see her husband's plays performed on the stage, to hear him

applauded, and to feel her heart ring with the echo of his praises. Such a wish could not be combated; and Paul took the only determination possible by resolving to bring his wife to Paris, and let her taste to her fill of the sensations which she coveted. He hoped that satiety would come to her as it had to him, making her long to renew their peaceful country life; and to hasten this end he decided that their baby should remain at St. Ricquier, the air of which was healthier for him than that of the capital.

Aimée flew to Paris like a bird uncaged. Everything in it was new to her, and the people most of all. The d'Arlays had a luxurious house, kept a carriage, a man cook, servants in livery, and all the appurtenances of a mansion where large hospitality is to be exercised. During the first week after their arrival, not scores but hundreds of cards were left at the door; invitations poured in from ministers, princes, nobles, from the lords of art and letters, from everybody with a name or a purse; and then managers and publishers trooped up to the author's dwelling. Since his marriage Paul had finished a five-act comedy and commenced a novel. The

comedy was at once accepted by the Théâtre Français and put in rehearsal; the novel was predicted in the papers to be the best he had ever written. (though no reporter had obtained a glimpse of it), and the title was given: *Un Mariage d'Amour*. Once more that brazen din which the most art-enamoured public in the world raises round its favourites resounded about Paul d'Arley, and to Aimée this din was music.

She was not stinted of it, nor of anything else she fancied, for Paul was too shrewd to think he could cure any woman of Parisomania if he put the slightest restraint on her pleasure-seeking, and his policy was that of confectioners, who encourage their assistants to surfeit themselves with dainties at starting in order that they may be for ever after abstemious. One day, having scanned his wife's attire, he remarked that it would not do for Paris, and took her to the eminent M. Worth's.

"Monsieur Worth," he said, "I have brought you my wife, and give you *carte blanche*; she relies on you to make her presentable."

M. Worth smirked with the air of a man who sees an exquisite picture very poorly framed.

"If Madame will put herself in our hands, I think we shall be able to do justice to her rare beauty."

"That is exactly what she wants," said Paul pleasantly; "so say you make her a dozen dresses to begin with."

"O Paul! a dozen!" exclaimed Aimée, with her provincial notions of economy quite startled.

"My dear child, M. Worth will tell you that a dozen are not too many if you are to hold your own against your good friends. I even question whether they will be enough."

From M. Worth's, Aimée was taken to the bonnet-maker's, furrier's, lace-maker's, glover's, and finally to the jeweller's. Of some hundred thousand francs which had been lying at Paul's banker's, two-thirds melted away at once in preparations for making Aimée presentable to bevy of women, not one of whom was half as comely as herself. But Paul disbursed without counting. "When she reflects that we are wasting our boy's money, perhaps she will feel a twinge," was his calculation.

Aimée, however, was in no more mood for reflecting than is a person who drinks champagne for the first time. During the first month the novelty of her position made her just a little shy and awkward; at the end of the second month she wore her fine low dresses with ease, had learned to improve her complexion with potato-flour (*vulgo* violet-powder), and had discovered that Nature had not given her hair sufficient without a chignon. At the end of the third month she had already marked herself a place in society; her drawing-room was a resort for wits; she could herself launch a repartee; and from week to week she lived the customary life of a woman of the world in all respects save one—church-going. Nothing would persuade her to attend Sunday mass or any other religious celebration. When she went by a church, she could not help turning away her head and reddening, as though she were passing a house where she had done something wrong.

It was at the end of this third month that Paul d'Arley's new comedy was brought out at the Théâtre Français. There was a general curiosity to note

whether marriage, always a hazardous experiment with brain-workers, had made any difference in Paul's talent, and the house was crammed with celebrities. From first to last the piece was a triumphant success. Never had the author's dialogue been brighter, his characters so boldly drawn, his dramatic situations more telling; and when the curtain fell on the closing act the whole audience rose, enthusiastically acclaiming the man whose fame was now placed for ever beyond dispute. This scene was too much for Aimée's young nerves. She had watched the performance from a stage-box with one of her new friends, the Countess de Tréma; and when the audience, seeing that Paul did not answer their call, recognised his wife and turned towards her *en masse* to do her a public homage, she fell back, white and quivering in every limb, and burst into tears.

When she had recovered her composure, and was driving home with the Countess, the latter said, with emotion—

“Dear Madame d'Arley, I do not wonder that you should have been so much moved, for your in-

fluence is discernible in every line of this new play, and you have good reason to be proud."

"How so?" murmured Aimée.

"Why, it is the first play of M. d'Arley's which sends one home with a full heart of soothing sentiments. In listening to his other works one is transported, electrified, yet the philosophy is so disconsolate that the spectator goes away discouraged. But this comedy we have just seen is a beautiful idyl—the work of a happy man."

Aimée answered nothing. In the last scene, where the hero, after trying adventures, settles down into a blissful home, Paul had arranged with the scene-painter to represent his own country-house, "The Elms," and on beholding this unexpected picture Aimée's eyes had filled with tears. Her heart overflowed now in listening to the Countess—but, once again, temples are not rebuilt in a day.

IV.

Eighteen months elapsed. During that time the d'Arlays travelled to the seaside, thence to Monaco, then went on a round of visits to the country-seats of friends. Only once Aimée snatched a hurried week to go and see her child at "The Elms;" but she was impatient to get away again. Fashion had caught her in its whirlpool, and Paul in his weariness could detect in her no symptoms of a wish to resume her old habits. When, however, they returned to Paris for the winter season, an explanation between them became necessary for pecuniary reasons.

One morning Aimée came with a long face to say she was in debt. Her housekeeping accounts would not square with her budget, and she feared she had been extravagant in millinery. Paul made good the deficit with something over, but he took the opportunity of stating his resources. The sale of his books and the performances of his plays

brought him about 80,000 francs a year, which was a sufficient income for ease, but not for squandering. His remonstrances were very gently worded, but to his surprise Aimée showed irritation at them. She was not at all the same Aimée as of yore. Her fresh complexion was fading under the influence of cosmetics and late hours, and her manners had something too deliberate in them.

"What you say is very just, Paul," she remarked, plucking at her smart dress; "but we could be richer if you pleased. Why are you so idle?"

"Idle, Aimée? That is the last reproach I should have thought of hearing from you."

"Well, I assure you I am not the person who originated it," she said doggedly. "A publisher was telling me the other day that you could earn four times what you are doing now if you chose to work more. And it's a fact that I have seen you writing half a day to fill three small sheets of paper."

"Well, yes, I have been almost three years about my new novel, which is now in the publisher's hands," admitted Paul quietly. "If I wrote more I might possibly be richer, but those few sheets of

paper will give us something better than money, Aimée—a fame which will, I trust, live after both of us.”

“Oh fame—fame!” exclaimed Aimée, pouting; “as if you had not enough of that already. And when we are both dead what can it matter to us, pray, whether your glory is more or less? The present is what we have to think of.”

Paul was shocked by this application of his theories.

“You forget our boy, Aimée,” he said.

“No, it’s you who forget him,” ejaculated Mdme. d’Arlay crossly. “You work, thinking only of yourself, as if our boy could make an income out of your name! If you did your duty as a father, you would labour to leave him a large fortune.”

This was not the first little cloud that had sprung up between them two, but it was the first that caused Paul d’Arlay the acute pang of feeling that his wife’s heart was no longer in unison with his own. He soon had a much greater cause of trouble, for Aimée became jealous of him.

It was perfectly natural that she should have be-

come so, for there had insensibly grown up between them that estrangement which is inevitable when husband and wife have contrary tastes and follow different pursuits. Paul had not time to dance attendance on Aimée in all her mundane excursions. He was busy with his novel—that novel which he had begun in his honeymoon, and was ending under the cruel regret of a happiness which seemed to have gone for ever. He hoped much of this work, and toiled carefully at it; and then he had academical duties. He had been deputed to report on the essays and poems to which the Academy awards yearly prizes, and Government had put him on a Committee for inquiring into International Copyright. As his house was always filled with visitors and with the noisy incomings of milliners and *costumiers*, he had hired private chambers where he could work undisturbed, and here he spent most of his days. He and Aimée seldom saw each other except at dinner-time. They had separate apartments, and Mdme. d'Arley seldom returned from her balls and routs till the small hours, not long before the time when Paul was accustomed to get up. All this was

Aimée's fault, not Paul's; but, womanlike, she came to fancy herself neglected. She would have had her husband accompany her in all her frivolous amusements, and when she found it impossible to prevail upon him so to do, she readily hearkened to the suggestions of her old evil-councillor, Mdme. de Marœuil, that Paul secretly bestowed on other women the attentions to which she was entitled.

Nothing could have been less true, but Mdme. de Marœuil and Aimée had become fast friends, and the former was anxious to repay the grudge which she owed Paul for the latter's violent threats. One evening at a ministerial party, when Aimée was looking more than usually out of spirits, Mdme. de Marœuil settled beside her on an ottoman, and adroitly led up the conversation to Paul d'Arley's private doings.

"Did you not tell me, dear, that your husband had lodgings in town?"

"Yes; he goes there every morning, and says he works. We are so little together that I have no time to question him."

"I wouldn't question him—men never tell the

truth; but if I were you, I would keep an eye on Mdme. de Tréma."

"Mdme de Tréma," ejaculated Aimée, with a sudden flush. "Why, do you think that she and Paul——; but it's impossible, she is one of my best friends."

"Reason the more. All I can say is, that I saw her brougham standing at the door where M. d'Arley's chambers are. But mind, no scenes or hysterics, dear. If M. d'Arley plays you false, you should take a leaf out of his own books; remember his theories in *La femme d'un Sot*, and make him jealous in his turn."

Now it was a fact that Paul d'Arley had elaborated a theory very much approved by French writers, and which may be summed up in the axiom that marital affection seldom lasts long, unless the wife can promote jealousy. This beautiful lesson was not lost upon Aimée. She had a host of admirers, and in the hope that she might bring Paul to look more closely after her, she singled out one—a handsome, puppy-like officer named de Marillac—and flirted systematically with him under Paul's eyes.

Unfortunately, Paul noticed nothing. He was too sensitive to ridicule to play the part of a Bluebeard, all the more so as he knew that many eyes in society were humorously watching to see whether he feared for himself the connubial woes which he had showered on so many personages in his books. So, although M. de Marillac was continually dangle about his house, danced with Aimée at balls, called on her in her box at the opera and theatres, and disported himself generally as only an amorous Frenchman can do, Paul paid not the slightest attention to him, acting like a man who feels secure of his wife's purity, and of his own. But this did not suit Mdme. de Marœuil.

When the flirtation between Aimée and the officer had been lasting three months—and let it be admitted that it was on Aimée's part a very innocent flirtation—Madame de Marœuil sought an opportunity to warn Paul, and make him miserable. The author was often compelled to escort his wife for an hour or two to official parties, and it was on one of these occasions that Madame de Marœuil glided up to him with a smiling look of effrontery.

"Well, my old enemy, it is a long time since we have spoken to each other. Is it still your intention to gibbet me?"

"You did me so much harm, Madame," answered Paul gravely, "that no reprisals of mine would be an adequate revenge; therefore I forgive you."

"That's kindly spoken, but I have always meant better by you than you suspect, Monsieur d'Arley; and to give you a proof, I must warn you now to observe your wife. She is young and inexperienced, and I am afraid she will be compromising herself with M. de Marillac. See them both together now. Well, it's like that every evening."

Paul glanced in the direction indicated, and not a muscle of his face betrayed that he was in the slightest degree moved. But the blow had come upon him like a bullet. For the first time the disproportion in age between his wife and himself occurred to him. She was almost a child, he was past middle age; she had married to be free from the restraints of convent life, he had taken a wife to find rest after a laborious and distracted career.

But how ludicrous might he not seem to her, with his melancholy pinings after that humdrum existence which she in her exuberant youth despised! He turned over this new reflection in many ways; nevertheless, he did not speak to Aimée about the officer. He waited till he had proof positive of her guilt or levity, whichever it might be, and it was not until he had observed the pair closely for another week that he resolved to remonstrate with Aimée whom he saw, or fancied he saw, to have been merely giddy.

It happened that the day on which he took this resolution was the eve of that on which his novel, *Le Mariage d'Amour*, was to be published. In that book he had poured out his whole heart in pictures of the felicity of tranquil love in wedded life, and, with the intuition which seldom fails an author who writes conscientiously, he felt that his work was powerful enough to move a reader; and he hoped—with what anxiety he himself only knew—that it might move Aimée. The early copies of the work had been sent by the publisher, and Paul took one of them to give his wife. Just as he was going

towards her apartments a letter was brought him from St. Ricquier, announcing that his child had been seized with an attack of hooping-cough; and this communication, though distressing, appeared to have come just in time to serve his purpose.

He found Aimée in her dressing-room, surrounded by tulle, silks and jewels, and other extravagant preparations for a fancy-dress ball.

"I am sorry to say our boy is ill, Aimée," he said, handing her the letter, and laying the book on the table. "I think we had better both go down to St. Ricquier to-night."

"Oh, it's impossible!" she exclaimed. "There's a ball at the Austrian Ambassadors's."

This was thoughtlessly, not heartlessly said, but so unmotherly a reply filled Paul with pain and some indignation.

"Supposing our child were to die while you were dancing?" he said severely.

"Oh, please don't talk in that depressing way, Paul. Let me see what the letter says. Hooping-cough; all children have hooping-cough; and this, the nurse says, is but a slight attack. We will go

to-morrow morning—the first thing, if you like. But what are you staring at?”

“Your dress—you are not going to wear that?”

“Why not, pray?”

“Because it is fit only for an actress—not an honest woman.”

“Dear me!” exclaimed Aimée mockingly. “And do you know where I got the idea of that improper dress? Why, out of one of your own books! One of your heroines—a Duchess—dresses as a Naiad for a Tuileries fête, and you fill two whole pages with sarcasms against her dreary husband, who objected to see her show off her beauty becomingly!”

Paul bit his lips. At every turn in his wedded life some sin of his pen was finding him out.

“You know I never proposed my books to you as models of morality,” he said, reddening. “I wrote many things when I was young of which I am ashamed now. But there is another thing about which I wished to warn you, Aimée. People are observing that you behave rather too unguardedly with M. de Marillac.”

“Aha! so your eyes condescend to look after

your wife at last!" cried Aimée, folding her arms, and gazing at him with flashes of stung pride. She was in a passion, her hair was falling over her shoulders, and she looked pretty and strange enough in her wildness. "Yes, it's true. M. de Marillac is fonder of my company than my own husband is. But before you have a right to reproach me, Paul, you must break off your relations with Madame de Tréma!"

"With Madame de Tréma? What an absurdity, Aimée! Will you accept my assurance that I have not spoken a hundred words with the Countess in the course of a twelve-month?"

"You're bound to say so, of course, but others tell me differently; and if you mean to use your liberty, Paul, I shall use mine."

"Not to go to this ball, I hope. I ask you once again, Aimée, to come with me to St. Ricquier, and to be more careful for the future in your conduct with that officer."

"And here is my answer," cried Aimée defiantly. "I *will* go to the ball, and I shall wear the dress which you put on your Duchess, and I shall dance

twice with M. de Marillac, as I have promised him to do; and if you are not satisfied, you must mend your behaviour to me, which has been unkind and unmanly to a degree.

"Very well, Aimée," said Paul, with a pale face. "I am not a tyrant, but when a woman disobeys her husband, and seems disposed to trifle with his honour, she brings punishment on the man who abets her misconduct," and with these words he left the room.

Aimée was a little frightened at what she had done; but she was secretly glad at having stirred Paul to jealousy, and flattered herself that in the journey which she truly proposed making with him on the morrow, a reconciliation might ensue between them. She cried, and if Paul had come back at that moment, she would have flung her arms round his neck and prayed his forgiveness. But he did not return; so she set off to the ball in her Naiad's dress, danced twice with M. de Marillac as she had promised him, and talked to him with a loud forced gaiety, whilst her heart fluttered terribly as she saw her husband coldly gazing at them both. What

followed need not have caused Aimée any surprise. Social conventions in France oblige a man to maintain his honour at the sword's point. Paul d'Arley glided up to M. de Marillac and beckoned him aside.

"Monsieur," he said calmly, "we are both men who can understand each other at a word. If you will name your seconds, we can settle our differences before daybreak."

The officer understood and bowed. "I must only declare to you that Madame is innocent," he added.

"I never doubted it," answered Paul quietly.

So a few hours later, and just before dawn, Paul d'Arley and the officer met in the Bois de Vincennes. The duel could not be a long one. M. de Marillac scarcely defended himself, and after a few passes Paul touched him on the chest. The seconds at sight of blood stopped the fight, and Paul, whose honour was conventionally satisfied by this scratch, returned to his house. The first thing that met him on his arrival was a telegram announcing that his child was much worse.

He sat down with a heavy sigh and reflected. Truth to say, it had not needed this announcement of his boy's illness to prompt him to the course he was now about to take; but the sad tidings justified his resolution. Of what use or pleasure was his wedded life to him now? He had pondered this question ever since he thought he had read in Aimée's eyes that she had ceased to love him, and the answer was this, that the sooner he was separated from her the better. He was growing old; his wife had many years of life before her; better leave her free to enjoy them in her own way since such was her bent. He was not moulded of the stuff to make domestic despots, and yet he loved his wife too well to bear her infidelity or discontent with resignation.

Coldly and quietly he sat down to write two letters—one to his lawyer, the other to his wife. In the first he made arrangements for settling three-fourths of his property on Aimée; in the second he informed her that he was going back to the Elms, and that as soon as her boy was better he would take him abroad and live with him there. He did

not wish Aimée to join him, he said: he preferred she should not do so for all their sakes.

But when he had written this letter, by which he cast his wife from him, what was it that made the sceptic pause before signing? It was grey morning, but there on his desk, beaming very white in the dim light, lay the ivory crucifix which had once hung in his wife's room, and which he had kept since the day when she had discarded it.

He took it up and looked wistfully at it, then for Aimée's sake he raised it to his lips. He had just done so, when it seemed to him that a door opened, and down the passage came, with quick steps and a panting breath, a footfall light as a child's flying for succour. It approached; now it was nearer.

"Who's there?" cried Paul, startled.

The door was not locked; it opened, and Aimée stood on the threshold, hugging her husband's new book to her breast, and looking at him with eyes brimming.

"I have read it to the last line, Paul," she cried, in a broken voice, and she flung herself at his feet.